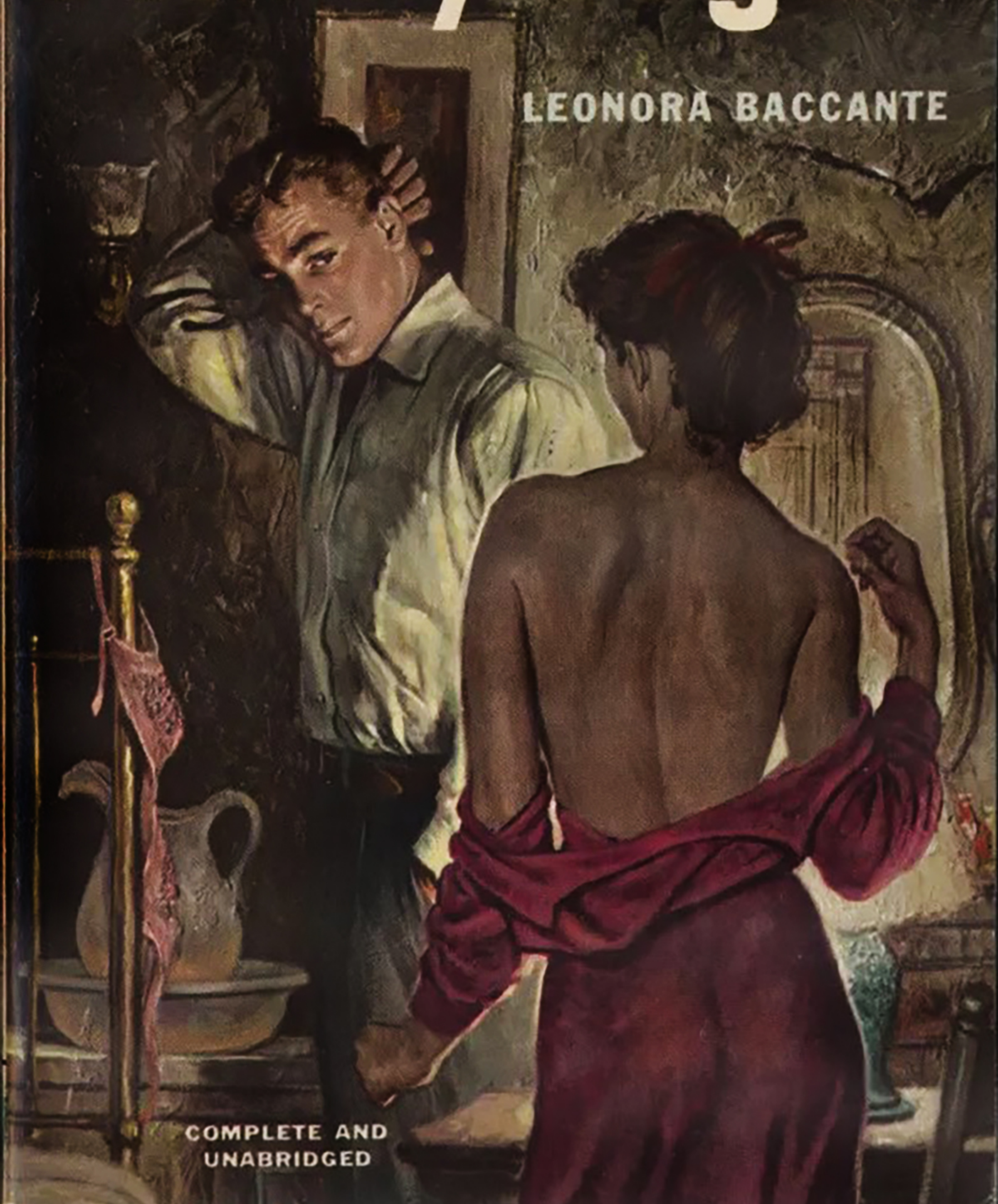
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A Realistic Novel Of Violent Young Love

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Johnny Bogan

LEONORA BACCANTE



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JOHNNY BOGAN

BY

LEONORA BACCANTE

ELDON PRESS LIMITED
CURZON STREET
MAYFAIR LONDON

First Published by
Eldon Press Ltd.
1933

All the names mentioned in this story are those of purely fictitious persons

Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis and Son, Limited, The Trinity Press, Worcester, and London.

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JOHNNY BOGAN

I

The pavement ended abruptly. Beyond it stretched a wide dirt road. This dwindled gradually, losing itself in the thick-wooded rising hills. The boy, standing at the pavement's edge, turned and stared fixedly down the road. Perhaps while he was looking the other way, thinking of other things, she would steal up on him, touch him, peer around into his eyes. Then he would start a little with relief and it would seem to him, now that she was here, that he hadn't been waiting so very long. But he would pretend to frown and look at her reproachfully and not stir until he heard her coaxing voice begging for forgiveness. Then he would look around quickly to make sure no one was in sight, and bend down and kiss her and then, arms closely interlocked, they would walk—a little quickly now that it was getting late—down the dwindling road.

The sun, big and red, was beginning its descent. The rays it shot out were blinding but of little warmth. Funny that when it was pale and high, it could scorch and parch you, and now so near and fiery, it left your body cool and indifferent. It was

beautiful. The dark edge of the hills was cutting off a piece. It would keep cutting off, cutting off, till the last small curve was gone. It was getting late. Perhaps if he turned now he would see her, slight and quick, hurrying down the street. She might be just turning the corner. The unbroken stillness behind him meant nothing; her footsteps were so light.

But the street was empty. He walked slowly to the corner. She might be coming into sight any minute. Then again she might be just starting out. Just starting out and he waiting there the better part of an hour. She might not even be starting out yet. He swallowed hard. Ugly words shot through his mind. He imagined himself saying them to her, hitting her in the face with the palm of his big, scrubbed hand. That might make her a little afraid. He tried to picture her cringing before him, weeping at his filthy words, ducking his blows. He failed utterly. By no trick of the mind, by no distortion of memory could he imagine her crying or cowering or even ducking blows. There she would stand, quiet, with her black eyes steady on him; there she would stand if the world itself cracked in her ears and before her eyes. She was afraid of nothing.

His anger left him suddenly. He felt only a need, almost ravenous, of her. "*Cathy, Cathy, Cathy.*" She must come. She must come if only to tell him that she couldn't go into the woods with

him to-day. But whatever she said, he would take her there anyway, he would pick her up and carry her there, running all the way. She could be as cold as death, she could look at him as steady as she pleased, he would take her anyway, he would kiss his passion into her, he would bite her till the blood came, he would suck in her blood and she would be his as never before. "*Cathy, Cathy, Cathy.*"

Trembling, he turned toward the sun. It was sinking fast behind the hills. She wasn't coming. His heart swelled a little, painfully. After a long half hour, he started to walk slowly toward home. "*You don't care for me. You don't give a damn for me. If you did, you'd let nothing interfere with your coming. I don't let anything interfere with me. Interfere! God! I think I'd be there waiting for you if I had to crawl along with both legs broken. Honest, Cathy, I think I would. But you'd let almost anything stop your coming. Oh, God, Cathy, why do you act like this to me? Don't you love me? Don't you love me any more?*"

His lips started to move. His eyes burned inwards on her image. His hands unclenched, almost as if to seize the small, patient figure. "*You didn't use to keep me waiting. Yes, but when you did, you'd come running up, you couldn't wait, you'd throw your arms around me, and remember? we'd race each other to the woods. Cathy, darling, there aren't many girls who can run like you. I used to fall*

behind purposely just to watch you run. And to see you turn around and laugh at me for not being able to keep up with you. Cathy, what's the matter, what's the matter, what have I done? Why don't you love me any more? You're trying to throw me over. You can't. You can't throw me over. I'll kill you if you throw me over. By God, Cathy, I'll kill you!"

His lips closed tightly, his broad shoulders stiffened, his walk became more powerful, as if he were lunging forward. But after a moment, his eyes blinked helplessly through sudden moisture.

He boarded the trolley at the juncture and alighted at the corner of River Road. But he did not turn down it, to his house, starting instead up High Street. He would not go as far as her house. He would not walk lingeringly by, then retrace his steps, in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. Not this time. Let her look for him. He would just stroll up High Street. If she happened to be coming down High Street, he might even pretend not to notice her. Just walk easily by her, and she hurrying down to meet him, perhaps, at the pavement's edge. Oh, God if he could do that. That might make her a little afraid. Just pass her by as if she wasn't the only person in the world he wanted to see, as if he couldn't see her and at once, in a crowd a thousand strong.

There was Birch Street. He turned into it, unresistingly, his heart beginning to thud. In ten

minutes he would be passing her house. She might be on the porch, even on the lawn. She might be able to flash a message to him with her eyes. He might be able to make a sign to her to meet him at once, or perhaps after dark, at the pavement's edge. He would bend down at her gate and fumble with his shoelace, and she could saunter to him and whisper quickly. If she would only do that. If she were only there. What if she wasn't home. What if——

He stopped. Two girls were coming toward him, arms linked, high heels clicking in unison on the asphalt, eyes brightly conscious. They saw him. One tossed her head at his hesitant smile, the other stopped, dimpled and gave a nervous giggle.

"Hello, Johnny," she said. Her voice was pleasantly throaty. She turned to her companion. "I know him." She laughed coyly. "Did you think he was one of those mashers?"

The girl smiled and bridled, casting the boy a sidelong glance. She was pretty, small and dark and faintly rouged. Her slim, pert-breasted figure reminded him of Cathy's, sharpening his disappointment.

He looked at her sombrely, seeing for a blind, electric moment, Cathy stretched rigid and trembling in his arms. The girl returned his gaze challengingly, then said to the other:

"Why don't you introduce us, Sophy?"

"Oh, that's right." She giggled again. "This is

Johnny and this is Grace Horner. Johnny Bogan and Grace Horner."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bogan."

A faint tinge of colour crept into the boy's cheeks. He mumbled his acknowledgment. Sophy said:

"Grace lives in Loring. She works in my office. She's visiting me over the week-end." Her eyes, at once coquettish and uneasy, fluttered from Johnny's face to that of her companion. They were pale eyes, blue like Johnny's. His were deep-set, but hers were big and round and somewhat bulging. There was a liquid quality about them that made one feel they could brim over frequently with facile tears. She seemed a little anxious now, and strained. He mustn't think Grace prettier than she. No boy, not even Johnny Bogan, must think Grace the prettier. It made her feel depressed and listless, vaguely humiliated. He was looking at Grace, smiling at Grace. He probably thought the colour in Grace's cheeks natural. She tried to think of some remark that would correct his impression without hurting Grace's feelings. She failed. Then she noticed that the powder had caked on Grace's nose. It made a grey and oily little splotch. It lifted her spirits. She looked at it fixedly, hoping that he would notice it too. Suddenly she raised her eyes, aware that Johnny's gaze was upon her.

"Where are you going, Sophy?" he said. He scarcely knew what he was saying. He was intent

only on prolonging this encounter in the hope of obtaining some word about Cathy. Sophy was her sister. Sophy would know where she was, what she was doing. If he could hold on to her for a while, he might bring the talk around to some mention of Cathy.

Sophy had replied: "We're going down to Rorke's for a soda. Where are you going?"

"Just walking."

Grace moved forward a little and said vivaciously:

"I just love walking. Last year when I was on my vacation I knew a fellow who used to take me on the longest hikes. You know, Sophy, I told you about him—Chet Allen. He was crazy about"—her eyes crinkled—"walking."

Johnny caught his cue. "Yes, about walking," he said dryly. Grace arched her eyebrows, her eyes growing bold. Sophy smiled vaguely. She was thinking with resentment that Grace was always mentioning boys' names to make an impression. It was unfair. She said a little brusquely:

"How are you getting on at college, Johnny?"

"All right."

"Oh, are you a college man?" Grace looked the merest bit checked. After an instant's hesitation, she went on casually: "A very good friend of mine is a sophomore at Princeton."

"I'm a junior—at the State University. That is, I start my junior year this fall."

Sophy interposed, a note of complaint in her voice: "I'm dying for some ice-cream. Have you tried the new Special Temptation at Rorke's yet, Johnny? They put in a ball of vanilla ice-cream, and then a ball of chocolate, and then they sprinkle little bits of fruit all over it and a new kind of syrup and whipped cream. It's simply marvellous."

"Marvellous!" mimicked Grace. "It's just grand. I like a plain ice-cream soda any day, don't you, Mr. Bogan?"

"Yes," said Johnny. He looked at Sophy with a sort of defiant plea. "I think I'll have one now."

"Yes, let's," said Grace.

"All right," agreed Sophy nervously. Johnny fell into step between them and they started off.

Crowded around the scrap of a table in the drug store, the girls chattered on, Johnny silent for the most part. He was waiting to hear her name mentioned. He couldn't say: "How is your sister Catherine?" Why should he care, in the midst of a sprightly conversation, how her sister Catherine was? She might even say: "What do you care about my sister Catherine?" These damned girls, they might say anything. Now if she started on some subject connected with Cathy, school, for instance, he might say it. But there she sat, her large, fair face sparkling, her large firm knee almost brushing his, talking about sodas and movies and clothes and what the floorwalker said to her in a Loring department store

and even about dogs. He thought for a moment of saying: "Your sister Catherine doesn't like dogs, does she?" but decided not to. She, and the other girl too, would be certain to find that queer. And Cathy would never forgive him if he aroused any suspicions about her.

They were finishing their ice-cream. They would rise now and walk out and he would have to leave them. If he were alone with Sophy, he could work her around into talking about her sister. This other girl was in the way. His mind scurried about, trying to devise a means of getting rid of her and holding on to Sophy. But nothing suggested itself. He rose with them and followed them futilely. They paused outside.

"Guess you have to go home now," he said, with an effort, to Sophy.

"Yes," Sophy agreed.

Grace gave a little laugh. "Where else can you go in this town?"

"If Cathy were home we could go driving," retorted Sophy. "It's lovely driving."

Johnny's heart leaped. The car! Why hadn't he thought about the car.

"Don't you drive?" he asked.

"No. I'm only learning, and besides, Cathy—my sister Catherine—has got the car. She's in Loring."

"I don't feel like just driving away," put in Grace. "There's no fun in just driving. Last Sunday we

went driving, but then we went to a place for chop suey and dancing. Do you like dancing, Mr. Bogan?"

"No," said Johnny impatiently. He had all but lost his presence of mind in his anxiety to learn more about Cathy.

Grace raised her head in haughty surprise. "You don't have to get excited about it."

Sophy intervened with her high laugh. The impatient tone he had used toward Grace pleased her, but the prospect of ruffled feelings and unpleasant words made her nervous. She took Grace's arm.

"Come on, Grace. Mother'll be wondering what's become of us."

But Johnny was not to be cheated of his opportunity. "Didn't I see you taking a driving lesson on the Calamy road this morning?" he said desperately.

"Why, no. It couldn't have been me. Cathy's giving me lessons and she's been in Loring at Amelia Sutter's since yesterday." She laughed, exhilarated at his interest. "No, I don't see how it could have been me."

"I guess it wasn't." He thrust his hands deep into his pockets, looked down for an instant, his teeth clamped in a paralysis of rage. Then he mumbled: "Well, got to get back. Good-bye," and walked quickly away.

The two girls looked after him.

"Well," said Grace emphatically. "Some sheik! He acts crazy!"

Sophy sighed complacently. At any rate, Grace would have no occasion to deduce from this encounter that she was more attractive than herself. "Poor Johnny. He is a little queer. But who wouldn't be, in his boots?"

"What do you mean, his boots? What's his boots got to do with his being crazy?"

"He's Johnny Bogan. You know, the shoemaker's son. I don't care. I don't see that it's his fault at all. I think he's——"

"What shoemaker? What's his fault? For goodness' sake, Sophy, will you . . . oh, the shoemaker! Well, *for goodness' sake!*"



II

THERE were other shoemakers in Duffield. But for the past six years "the shoemaker" to Duffield was Oscar Bogan, "the shoemaker's son," Johnny Bogan. For a brief space it had been "poor" Johnny Bogan. But Johnny himself had quickly forfeited all claim to righteous pity. He had not behaved properly. He aroused antagonism and exasperation, going about his business, a great boy of sixteen, as though absolutely nothing had happened. It gave one a creepy feeling to see him pass by unconscious of stares, unconscious of whispers, unconscious of pity. He served his apprenticeship capably at the garage, giving promise of a first-class mechanic. Every day, when his work was done, he could be seen scrubbing his hands industriously, wiping them carefully, picking out the dirt from under the fingernails with a knife. In the evenings, occasionally, he went to Loring with Tim Risely in the latter's dilapidated old car, and returned to sleep alone—and peacefully, for all anyone knew—in that house. As though nothing had happened.

It was nine years before that the Bogans had come

to Duffield: a middle-sized man, thin, crumpled and limp like elastic with all the "give" gone; a large woman with a loose, bitter mouth, very slatternly and passionately devout; a fair, sturdy boy, silent and unchildish and steadily dirty. They apparently had some money. They bought outright the little house at the farther end of River Road. The house, a narrow, mean-looking structure, had no porch. It stood at the edge of the road, presenting the aspect of a face without eyebrows. There were no trees about it, no grass except for the parched and scraggly growth on either side. But in the distance to the front were the hills. And to the right, one could catch a glimpse of the broad and gleaming river.

It was soon known that there was no peace in the shoemaker's house. It was enough to see the way the woman, Mrs. Bogan, looked at her husband, the way she spoke to him, the way she smiled secretly at civil words others spoke to him. There were, too, frequent quarrels, alarming affairs. The woman's voice could be heard sometimes all the way down to Petter's garage, which stood quite a distance away where River Road joined High Street. Once the shoemaker had been seen to fling a shoe at his wife. She had ducked it, picked it up and thrown it back at him. It had caught him in the face, but he had just stood motionless, staring at his wife who, her face out-thrust, her bosom loose and quivering under her kimono, had called him some pretty names. The

baker's wife, stopping for a pair of shoes she had left to be mended, had walked in on an amazing scene one evening. Mrs. Bogan was standing in the doorway between the shop and the room beyond and she was talking and laughing in a peculiar sort of way. Bogan was seated on his workbench, his head, in the crook of his arms, on the table which was littered with shoes, tools, nails and bits of leather. And—this was the amazing thing—while the woman talked, the man wept. Mrs. Bogan fell instantly silent when she saw the baker's wife, but Bogan wept on, and even when he raised his head, merely motioned her to go away. Fortunately Mrs. Bogan had intervened, wrapped up the shoes for her and smiled her out.

Under the circumstances the shoemaker's boy was not a fit companion for boys and girls from respectable Duffield homes. He was obediently left alone. Sometimes after school hours, he lingered around the school-house, watching the boys scrambling and tumbling and running after each other on the broad lawn. He stood erect watching them, his hands in his pockets, his light, deep-set eyes expressionless. Most days, however, he went straight home. He found a piece of bread in the kitchen and perhaps some cold meat from yesterday's supper. He sat in the kitchen eating, or if his mother were there, he took the food into the shop and ate it there. His father worked away, cutting leather, nailing, scrap-

ing, grinding. Few words passed between the two. The father, occasionally aware of the boy's indifferent gaze, would twist a little on his bench and half turning his head, say:

"Go out and play, Johnny."

As often as not, the boy did not stir, continuing to munch, and the man turned back to his work and there was a silence as though nothing had been said.

The boy liked to walk along the river's edge. There was a little path leading to the brink of the river, but he preferred to go through the woods, crashing through the underbrush, pushing aside low-hanging branches, warding off brambles. It gave him a feeling of excitement, and when he emerged into the clearing to the bright expanse of water, a sense of conquest, discovery. He fished, with a rod made of a whittled branch and some yards of twine. He brought his catches home and put them on the kitchen table where his mother would find them. Sometimes she cleaned and cooked them, sometimes she threw them away, and sometimes she let them lie there until they began to reek or until she needed the table space. Then she would catch them up and fling them onto the garbage heap and begin to scold, beginning with Johnny's misdemeanor in leaving the fish around, going on to his worthlessness in general, and ending with his father. She always, no matter what her complaint, ended with his father. She never referred to him by name; it was always

"he," "him," "his," and in her mouth the simple pronouns were obscenities of hate and derision. While she talked, Johnny looked at her impassively, thinking: "I hope she dies. I hope she dies. I hope she dies. . . ."

He ran away twice. The first time, when he was eleven, he returned in a week. His father only said in his humble voice: "Where were you, Johnny?"; but his mother wept over him and cooked some food for him immediately and laid all blame upon his father. It wasn't until two days later that she beat Johnny for the worry he had caused her.

The second time he ran away was in the summer of his fourteenth year, and this time he stayed away two months, working on a farm some thirty miles away. He came back because he wanted to go to the high school.

Old man Petter gave him work afternoons, odd jobs around the garage. The money he earned enabled him to buy what he needed for his school work, and, with scrupulous hoarding, a suit of clothes, a shirt or two, a pair of shoes. His body was decently kept now, his coarse blond hair brushed, his clothes neat, his skin fresh and clean. The skin on his hands had a brittle and bleached look from constant washing in gasoline. Old man Petter, watching him scrape and scrub mercilessly at his hands at the end of the afternoon, would nod his head approvingly. Once he said with a smile:

"Don't want to be around a garage all your life, lad, eh?"

"No," replied Johnny, flushing a little. He had a definite liking for old man Petter, and liking came hard to Johnny, disturbing him. It made him anxious and uneasy and gave him a sense of defencelessness. He lowered his eyes and continued scrubbing with breathless vigour.

He got through the school year very creditably, and in the summer worked at the garage all day. Silent, somewhat sullen and doggedly intent on his studies, he had made no friends at the high school. He had wanted none; had rejected the one opportunity to form an acquaintance. . . .

A girl in his history class had spoken to him once. She was thin, small and dark, not pretty, but so dainty, so finished a little person, that he felt, all at once, grossly exaggerated beside her. She said to him:

"I—I was thinking—— Do you know, you're the biggest boy in the class and I'm the littlest girl."

He stared at her, astonished. She went on, more firmly: "We ought to be friends. Though I'm not so very little, either. I'm taller than Beth Stevens and Jessie Whitehead and two or three others, only I look the littlest because I'm thin. Don't you like me?" She finished in a hurried little plea. She bit her lip delicately and lowered her eyes, while Johnny stood staring at her, speechless. Then she lifted her

head, gave him a neat little smile and said: "Well, never mind." She walked away.

By the time Johnny left the garage that evening, he had forgotten the incident. At supper his mother began to mull over some grievance or other. He watched her for a while, his usually indifferent face glowering. Then with a sudden movement, he cried out: "Oh, shut up!"

It was the first time in his life he had spoken to her in such a manner. His father looked up at him, startled. His mother, her spoon splashing abruptly into the soup before her, seemed to grow larger in her chair, stared at him, then turned to his father. Her voice held a sort of awed triumph. It was as if she wanted to say: "This is fresh evidence of your vileness, my martyrdom. I wasn't expecting it, I wasn't hoping for it, but it's come and I'm glad it's come." Her voice rose in pitch suddenly. Johnny and his father ate on in dogged silence. She began to cry, the tears streaming down her flabby face, sliding into the folds that ran from her nose to her mouth. She didn't used to cry often in the earlier years. Her now frequent tears seemed to be the surrender to the memory of a misery rather than a protest to the misery itself. Johnny pushed aside his plate. He felt an intolerable loathing of her. He noted her eyes, shrunken and drowned; her mouth, full and shapeless, rayed with a score of little lines vertical across the upper lip, dragging

downward at the corners. Her nose was dripping. She caught up her apron and blew weakly into it. Still crying and talking in a sort of bleat, she went to the stove, scooped out three baked potatoes and in her apron carried them to the table. Johnny rose and, pushing back his chair noisily, went out. He thought bitterly: "Who the hell wants any friends!"

III

He drifted into his first companionship, with Tim Riseley. Tim was Petter's first helper, a smallish, rakish chap with a ruddy face and bad teeth. He was not native to Duffield. He had turned up a year before, a battered but jaunty tramp, had begged a quarter from Petter, been put to work for it, and had somehow been kept at it since. He was the best mechanic Petter had ever had, and the "old man" was placidly fixed against parting with him.

"I'm quittin'," Tim announced periodically. "This burg's too dead for me."

"Nay, my lad," Petter would reply peacably. "You've a good job and you're thirty-four and it's time you were settling down. This place and another, it's all the same, you need be having bed and bread wherever you are, and you're getting it best here. Put in a night in Loring if you must and sleep it off in the morning. You can come in at noon."

So Tim put in a night in Loring, slept it off the next morning and made up for it amply from noon on. He had a constant and stimulating feeling that he was putting it over on old man Petter. It con-

tributed, perhaps as much as anything else, to keeping him anchored to the garage.

With Tim, Johnny went to the movies once or twice, and then more or less regularly to Loring merely, as Tim put it, "for the life". They parked the fourth-hand car Tim had bought from Petter and not yet paid for, and rambled through the brightly lit streets. Tim peered into the face of every girl that passed by and made advances with aplomb, stoically cheerful in the face of the coldest rebuff. He had two major classifications for womankind, and every girl that passed was assigned to either one or the other with the comment:

"She's a hot baby," or "She's a cold baby."

Women, Tim confided, were his great weakness. The tone in which he said it made Johnny feel somehow respectful. And he knew them like a book, thank God. From coast to coast, from borderline to borderline, he knew them all. Not to mention France. *Not* to mention France. His lore on women included innumerable dirty stories, a collection of picture postcards that he had stolen from a prostitute, and the location, class and price of admission of every bawdy house in the country. At least of the five hundred he had visited. He admitted five hundred was a round number. Though when it came to that he knew at least a dozen right in Loring itself. He suddenly remembered a story he had heard in one only last week. . . .

Johnny listened, his face impassive. But within, he burned, with excitement, with apprehension, with a thousand restless flickers of questions and desires. Thrown violently from eagerness to dismay, from bewildered sensuality to uneasy shame, from sharp curiosity to as sharp repugnance, his evenings with Tim left him tired and wakeful, restlessly exasperated. Once or twice, afterwards, he avoided Tim in the evenings, walking alone by the river's edge, or reading in his little room the books he took regularly from the library.

But Tim could be as graphic on other topics as he was on sex. Johnny listened enthralled to the stirring accounts of Tim's gallantry under fire. For Tim had been in the war, and if his tales were a little garbled where dates and other incontrovertible facts were concerned, they were none the less dramatic. He had been a sailor, too, at some time in his life, and the hero of at least two maritime disasters. Of this Johnny was unexpectedly sceptical which, while it amazed his friend, did not prevent him from embarking buoyantly on still another remarkable story of his courage.

When school started again, Johnny saw less of Tim. The winter passed uneventfully: school, work at the garage, lessons at home, and occasionally a movie. He had grown tall and broad. Not yet sixteen, he already looked a man, the line of the jaw a little hard, the set of the mouth a little grim. There

was about him a look of purpose, steady and deliberate. The townspeople noticed him and said it was a shame that he had got such a bad start in life. With a home life like his! If he amounted to something in spite of it, it would be a wonder. Then, too, he was a little queer himself, so silent and even surly. And the way he walked about, looking at nobody with those light, staring eyes straight ahead of him. He hardly seemed normal despite the fact that he was known to do well at school.

Toward the end of May of that year, on a Friday night, Johnny went with Tim to Loring. It was an exhilarating evening. They induced two girls to enter the car, and though Tim was soundly slapped by one of them subsequently, the evening on the whole was pleasant if nothing more than titillating. They got home late. The light was still burning in the shop as Johnny came in. His father was seated at the worktable. He wasn't working. He was just sitting there, huddled, his weary head sunk forward a little. Johnny glanced at him, then went upstairs to bed. In the morning he came down and fixed his own breakfast as he usually did. His mother slept late mornings. His father was already at his worktable. He looked curiously as if he had not moved since the preceding night. The only difference in his position was that now he held a shoe in one hand and a little knife in the other as though he were about to start work.

Johnny worked all day at the garage on Saturdays. At about noon, a man rushed in, pale, beads of perspiration on his face, and cried shakily to old man Petter:

"Got to use your phone. Police. Shoemaker killed his wife. Bogan up the road!" He ran to the phone. Petter roared: "What!" and everybody in the garage turned swift, staring eyes upon Johnny, who was bent over a tyre. Johnny straightened up and turned to the man at the phone.

"What?" he said. His voice was hard and dry.

The man recognized him. He gulped and stammered, then attacked the handle of the phone again in a frenzy. Johnny looked only at old man Petter. He then put down the tools which he had been grasping, and walked out.

There were half a dozen scared and excited small boys around the house. They scattered when they saw him. He went in. His father was still sitting on his workbench, but his hands were now in his lap and his face was turned toward the door. Two men stood beside him. They shifted awkwardly on their feet when they saw Johnny. He didn't look at them. He said to his father:

"Did you kill her?"

His father nodded dumbly. Two tears rolled out of his eyes. They rolled down his cheeks and fell on his withered and scrawny neck. He said in his humble monotone:

"Last night. With a knife. In her neck. I put her in the bushes behind the outhouse. She——"

Johnny stopped him with a brutal gesture. Then he sat down and stared out of the window. The old man's head drooped.

They took him away later. They took Johnny's mother away too. Johnny had one look at her when they brought her into the house. "She's dead, all right," he thought vaguely. Suddenly a cold dismay seized him. Dead or alive, she was his mother. His kinship to her was inescapable. He was her blood, her flesh. A frenzied sense of injustice possessed him. He wanted to cry out, repudiate her. He wanted to cut his veins and let the blood flow out. He wanted despairingly to die, since there was no release in her death. He was to know bitterer emotions in his life, but none so terrifying and none so profound as the shame that held him now.

He went to the funeral and felt a little better when she had been lowered into the grave. She was gone. He would forget about her. He would pretend so hard that she had had nothing to do with him that the pretence in time would become real. He held his head higher and took the ground with firmer steps. Home, he fried some eggs and made coffee and, having eaten, sat in the kitchen, feeling tired and somewhat chilled and as if nothing was quite real. It was a disturbing feeling. He went into the shop. Looking at his father's worktable, the tools,

the little, sharp knives, he imagined the old man creeping up on his mother, plunging the knife into her neck. It was a horrible picture. He wondered if they would hang his father. A pang shot through him. It would be better if the old man were dead too. He had no hate for his father. He just didn't like to think about him. He went restlessly back to the kitchen. The tin sink in the corner was piled high with dirty dishes, some of them from supper of the night of the murder. There were pots on the stove caked with grease and food that was beginning to smell of decay. He had an impulse to run from the house, to leave it and all its associations forever behind him. He was thinking of where he would go and what he would do, while he was looking around, noting the cake of soap near the sink, the broom in the corner, the pail and scrubbing brush under the sink. If the old man had only waited till the school year was finished. . . . He took off his coat and laid it out on the back of a chair. People would be forever looking at him and whispering about him . . . he didn't care . . . he liked only old man Petter and Petter acted as if nothing had happened. . . . On a nail near the door hung an apron, limply. It was of pink-and-white checked calico with a coarse lace edging. It was spotted and creased and a pocket hung from two or three stitches.

A number of people passed the Bogan house that

day, as they had on every other day since the murder. Peering in, they caught glimpses of Johnny Bogan in his mother's apron, upsetting the house in a passion of cleaning.

IV

JOHNNY finished the year at school, working afternoons, as before, at the garage. In July Petter took him on at a regular wage for full time. Mrs. Petter was uneasy about it. She had a vague idea that Johnny should be put away in an asylum or in one of those reformatories. She had three growing daughters.

"What have they to do with the lad?" Petter wanted to know mildly. "It's not his fault what's happened. He's a decent lad, and game too. Doesn't sit moping around over what can't be helped. Leave him be."

"Doesn't sit moping!" Mrs. Petter exclaimed indignantly. "Indeed he doesn't. His father in prison, his mother not cold in her grave, and what does he do? Puts on his mother's apron and cleans the house, that's what he does!"

"It was a mighty dirty house," observed Petter.

"But how does it look, his setting to and cleaning it the day his mother is lowered into her grave, and murdered, too, poor thing. Brrr. And then," her voice grew louder and more heated, "he takes her

clothes and makes a bonfire of them. Burns them, his poor murdered mother's clothes the day she's murdered—buried."

"He had no use for them and they must have been some dirty. She was a mighty dirty woman, rest her soul."

"She was his mother," Mrs. Petter reminded him sternly.

"Aye, that I know," returned Mr. Petter equably.

Mrs. Petter glanced toward the kitchen where her three daughters were washing, wiping and putting away the supper dishes, and lowered her voice.

"What does he do, going to Loring nights with that Tim Risely of yours? His mother murdered, and barely a month, his father waiting to be hanged for it, and him running around Loring nights with Tim Risely. A squirt like him, barely sixteen." She pursed her lips and glared significantly at her husband. Petter adjusted his glasses on his large nose and picked up the newspapers.

"It's no business of mine," he said, "nor of yours, mother. Leave the lad be."

Mrs. Petter attacked her knitting dismally. There was no discussing anything with Petter. He was the most un-Christian and unreasonable man alive.

Oscar Bogan was sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead. The execution was to take place late in September. Johnny saw his father four times in all before his death. They had little to say

to each other. Bogan asked what Johnny's plans were.

"I'll get along," replied Johnny, and nothing further was said on the subject.

Once Bogan stammered out, when they had been sitting in dreary silence not looking at each other:

"She drove me to it. I was afraid for years that I'd do it. She was a terrible woman. You don't know——"

Johnny looked up at his father. He said unevenly:

"That's all right. You should have done it sooner. . . ."

Tears rushed into the weak, blue eyes.

"No. I should have gone away. I don't know. It doesn't matter. I—I'm sorry you were born."

Johnny said again: "That's all right. I'll get along." His father turned his face away and wept silently. Johnny wanted to touch him, to put his arm around his shoulders. But he sat still wretchedly, his eyes on the hollow in the old man's neck.

It was after his third visit to his father, that Tim took Johnny to call on the Misses Morrison. Tim had taken the tragedy in his young friend's life with a protective sort of bluster at first. An attitude of sententious cynicism had followed, and then a frankly brutal curiosity. Since none of these had the slightest effect on Johnny's stolidity, Tim was

obliged to ignore with him the tragic episode; and their companionship proceeded along its former lines. Johnny's attitude, however, left its impression on Tim, in the form of a new and slightly awed respect. The kid was somehow a man; still, even as a man, there were things Tim Risely could show him and do for him. In this spirit, as much paternal as patronizing, Tim made the appointment with the Misses Morrison.

The Misses Morrison were sisters. They lived in a modest, two-story house on a quiet street in Loring. There they dispensed social life with their favours to a gentleman apiece, a night. They were in their early thirties, engaging, modest and lady-like until they got drunk. Then they did unexpected things and laughed continuously in a shower of little shrieks. They were expensive, but Tim had got a rise a short while before, and he treated. He made quite a ceremony of it, selecting Johnny's tie for the occasion and admonishing him the night before to take a bath. The Misses Morrison were particular. He observed that he was glad to be able to start Johnny right in life. He himself had had a lamentable start. He gave Johnny full particulars up to the very door of the Misses Morrison.

The ladies received their guests prettily in their drawing-room, a longish room crammed with red plush furniture. The springs in the sofa sagged nearly to the floor, straining through the canvas bot-

tom here and there. One of the chairs shed a little of its sawdust stuffing gently upon the floor every time someone sat down in it. There was an upright piano in one corner. The carpet was bright, showing baskets of red, green and tan roses in a wide border. On the whole, the room was both elegant and home-like with its rubber plants by the windows, its lace curtains, its spray of artificial flowers on the piano, and its numerous crocheted doilies worked in gay colours and placed carefully wherever it was remotely possible to place a crocheted doily.

Johnny was painfully impressed both with the room and the Misses Morrison. He thought for a breathless instant that Tim must have made some mistake. But Tim had retired to a corner with one of the Misses Morrison and Johnny caught a glimpse of bills changing hands. The Misses Morrison were paid in advance, Tim had told him. He drew a quick breath and faced the other Miss Morrison with a slight scowl. She smiled at him. She was plump and fair and the upper row of her teeth stuck out slightly, forming her lips into a pout. She said formally, with the intention of starting a conversation:

"Mr. Risely tells us you work for him, Mr. Bogan."

Johnny mumbled something in reply. Miss Morrison turned a ring daintily on her finger and changed the subject.

"Are you fond of music, Mr. Bogan?"

Johnny nodded dumbly and Miss Morrison, thus encouraged, began to hum lightly a popular air. Tim came over and said jovially:

"How about washing the throat down first?"

Miss Morrison passed around an arch smile and rose. "I'll be right back," she promised and left the room.

She returned with a tray holding a bottle of whisky and four glasses. She served the liquor with a gracious air. As she refilled the glasses, she asked her sister to play them a tune. Her sister complied after a little coaxing and played loudly and triumphantly. They all applauded, Johnny tardily, when she had done.

Well-being surged in Johnny, almost like an exultation. The room, the plush of the chair in which he sat, the speckless doilies, the fresh, powdered faces of the women, the piano, the warmth of the whisky beginning to tingle under his skin, the ease flowering, as it were, out of worldly decorum—for the moment they filled his life with grace; he felt destined for bright and eager living, he was at once tremulous and triumphant. The gaiety increased. The glasses were filled a third time and a fourth time. More tunes were played; there were songs and little gushes of laughter. Tim stole a kiss from one shrieking Miss Morrison and Johnny stole a kiss from the other. The glasses were filled yet again. . . . And now Johnny sat tightly in his chair while

the room, the Misses Morrison and Tim rocked gently about him. The sense of well-being was gone. He knew clearly that he couldn't stand up. He knew nothing else quite clearly except that—and the fact that before long he would have to get up and follow his Miss Morrison upstairs. He didn't want to stand up, he didn't want to keel over, he would kill them if they laughed at him. He glowered silently. The Misses Morrison exerted all their social as well as their womanly graces. They recaptured something of their earlier manner. His intent, resentful eyes goaded them to make an impression on him, to renew, rather, the impression they had seemed to make at first. He was rather a queer one, but he was young and big and attractive and both the girls retained a romantic weakness for attractive customers.

In fact, by this time, Johnny was no longer sure which Miss Morrison was his. They both hovered about him, they both kissed him, they both had successively, and once or twice co-operatively, plumped down in his lap, twining amorous arms around his neck. One had bitten both his ears playfully. The other had undone his tie and rumpled his hair. Tim grew gloomy under the neglect of him. He sat down on the piano stool and regarded the tableau before him bitterly. What the hell did they think this was, a free-for-all, or a church social, playing ring-around-the-rosy with the kid? They'd better make

up their minds how they were going to pair off and damn quick about it. He had taken possession of Lola because he had had her before, but he'd just as soon make love to the other one. She didn't have as good a figure as Lola, but Tim would try anything once.

Lola became aware of Tim sitting on the piano stool. She was trying earnestly to force another drink on Johnny. She put the glass down and came over to Tim.

"Whassa matter, darling?" she crooned, leaning over on him and sending him against the piano with a crash. She laughed shrilly. "My God, nearly upset you, didn't I?"

Tim recovered his balance and gave her a nasty smile. "Nearly forgot me, didn't you?"

Miss Morrison beamed coyly. He was jealous. She was indomitably romantic, receiving her nightly caller as a beau courting her favour. The spirit dominated her under a few drinks. It was always, however, a little difficult to regard Tim in the proper light. He had, for one thing, a coarse habit of referring to the high cost of her. Once he broke down and wept, declaring that she was taking the bread out of the mouths of his children. Miss Morrison was instantly touched to learn he had children and wept considerately with him. Then she learned that he had no children and she was indignant. She wanted to raise the price to him high enough to keep

him away, but her sister wouldn't let her. She was glad that he called infrequently.

Now she sidled up to him, casting a calculated glance at Johnny, who was staring as if hypnotized at her sister seated in his lap.

"What a big friend you have," she cooed, partly out of orthodox coquetry and partly because Johnny was on her mind.

"Yeah?" said Tim, burning. Who the hell was paying for this party? "How would you like to change places with Aline?"

She giggled girlishly. "Bad, bad, bad," she admonished, and then in a whisper: "I like you." She stood off and looked at him, her head cocked tolerantly. This was good fun. Tim looked at her. She did have a good shape, damn her. He rose and said gruffly:

"Well, come on then, let's git goin'."

Miss Morrison's high spirits fell a little. He was always businesslike, always in a hurry, though he had all night before him. She evaded his eyes and pouted:

"Let's have another drink."

The sister joined them. Johnny refused stubbornly to take another sip. His eyes were on the sofa. He wasn't going upstairs. He had his hands pressed tightly against Miss Morrison's ample bosom. His light eyes were humid. He wanted badly for the others to go.

But Miss Lola found reasons for delaying. Her sister interceded finally. She rose and said skittishly: "It's getting late. Shoo. Bedtime. Shoo." The other sulked and threw Johnny a grieved, longing look. But she put her arms obediently around her sister's neck. They made a pretty little picture kissing each other fondly good night.

Tim and Lola were no sooner out of sight on the landing atop of the stairs, than Johnny rose and in one breath blew out the lamp on the table. At the same time he seized Miss Morrison. She gave a little startled scream and tried to pull away. Stumbling dizzily, he dragged her to the sofa. They fell on it in a little heap, Johnny banging his head on the arm. Miss Morrison, still struggling, now whispered: "Wait. Wait. Upstairs."

Johnny whispered back in a strangled voice: "No, here."

There was playfulness in this Miss Morrison too. Besides, this was unheard of, this was extremely irregular, this had never happened before and it frightened her. With a supreme effort she wrenched loose and scrambled to the stairway.

"Come on," she called over her shoulder, her voice uncertain but lilting. She ran heavily up the stairs. Johnny, furious and inflamed, charged after her. There was a sudden cry: "Oh, Aline!" and the other Miss Morrison appeared on the landing. Her

white petticoat splotched the darkness. She met her sister on the stairs. She said excitedly:

"Aline, do you know who he is? He's Johnny Bogan. He's the shoemaker's son. The man that stabbed his wife in Duffield. He's the shoemaker's son, Aline, the man that killed his wife!"

Johnny sucked in his breath. He let go the woman's dress that he had been clutching. For an instant he stood motionless, while his head spun around and around. Then suddenly he lunged forward and caught Miss Morrison around the waist. She gave a scream of terror. He dragged her down the stairs. The other Miss Morrison began to scream too. Tim came running to the scene, cursing. Johnny had the woman near the sofa now, muffling her mouth with his big hand. Tim gained the bottom of the stairs. He struck a match, looked swiftly around and found the lamp. The sudden light doused Johnny like a bucket of water. He released the woman and rose, unsteadily, blinking. Miss Morrison scrambled to her feet. Her sister ran to her and they clung together, trembling.

Tim surveyed them, snapping deliberately into his suspenders which had been hanging down. He was in his undershirt and trousers. His eyes were bloodshot but he was quite sober.

"What d'ye want, the police?" he said, eyes narrowed. "Or do you want me to beat hell out of you for raising such a stink?" He was furious. He had

only thought to dampen Lola's interest in Johnny somewhat. He had, now, a vague suspicion that it was a hankering for Johnny rather than a squeamish concern for her sister that had led her to interrupt them; but for the moment his chief concern was the kid. He shot a covert glance at him, dazed and limp against the stairpost, his hair wild, his clothes rumpled and awry. He had half a mind to kick up the two drabs thoroughly.

"Just who do you think you are, anyway? Too good for the likes of him? Hey? That hands me a laugh! Honest, if that don't hand me a bellyful of 'em!" He wanted to convey to Johnny that he had meant no harm, that he had merely over-estimated the intelligence of these creatures. "You ——" He delivered fluently a vivid description of them as he saw them in relation to their profession. He ended up with:

"Now, do you want to get down to business, or do you want to hand me over my good dough and damn quick about it?" Frightened, whimpering and hurt to the soul, the Misses Morrison moved over to the bureau. Lola unlocked the bottom drawer and took from it two bills. Tim snatched them from her outstretched hand.

"Get me my shirt and coat," he ordered her. She obeyed. He dressed, leering at the unhappy women as he tucked in his shirt. Then he put Johnny's hat on his head and steered him gently out.

Tim drove around the streets of Loring, not heading for home. Johnny revived after a while. He looked around and said dully:

"Where you going?"

"We'ell—I thought—I know a place——"

"I want to go home."

Tim shrugged resignedly and turned the car around. They were half way home when Johnny suddenly turned to him. His voice was hard and low.

"You can turn back. But it's got to be a place where everybody'll keep their mouths shut."

Tim slowed down and began earnestly: "Listen, Johnny——"

Johnny interrupted him. "It's all right. Only keep your mouth shut. And everybody else too. I don't want to go where there's got to be talking and singing and all that bunk. I'm not going for talking."

Tim again turned the car around. Johnny added bitterly:

"All that bunk!"

V

JOHNNY missed the next year's schooling, working at the garage during the day. In the evenings, he read, or walked alone, or went to Loring with Tim. Sometimes they took in a movie, or sauntered about as before; and sometimes they visited the furtive houses scattered on the outskirts of Loring. They picked up girls now and then and once finished the evening at a dirty little hotel. Some months after their ill-starred visit to the Misses Morrison, Tim suggested that they call there again. But Johnny didn't even reply to the suggestion.

The following year Johnny registered at the night school in Loring. He attended four evenings a week. Tim advised him earnestly against thus wasting his time. He was quite resigned to settling down by now. He wanted Johnny to sell the house and invest the money in a garage on the State road, in partnership with him. Johnny shook his head.

"Well, you ought to sell the house, anyway. What do you want it for? It ain't no good to you."

"Where will I live?"

"Board, like I do."

"No. I want to live alone. The house is all right. I'll sell it when I'm ready to quit Duffield."

"Where you goin'?"

"I don't know," Johnny said vaguely. He couldn't tell Tim, though he knew. He was going to get through the high school course and then enter the University. He would save every penny he could till then, so that he could attend classes in the daytime. If he studied very hard he might get a scholarship and that would help. And then he could pick up odd jobs here and there. He was capable with his hands. In the summer vacations Petter would take him on at the garage, and he would save money against the next year of school. He was going to study engineering. He thought definitely of constructing intricate machines. . . . And he thought vaguely of planning bridges, building railroads. . . .

And afterwards there would be another life in a great city. There would be a girl, queenly and exquisite, with a soft voice and beautiful, shining hands, a girl whom no other man had ever touched. There would be a house spotlessly clean and very spacious, with paintings hung and books lining the walls, and bathrooms and many windows perhaps looking out on a river. Shining and beautiful and proud. *And there would be the beginning of Johnny Bogan!* Duffield, the garage, Tim, the house on River Road, his mother and father and the nebulous and obscure line from which they had sprung—gone,

obliterated, never-been. He would shape not only his own destiny, but his own source! He would deny his mother's womb, he would deny the scheme of the race. He would be another First Man.

The mean unloveliness of these years didn't matter. He wasn't born yet.

Then Johnny was nineteen. He stood just outside the garage, feeling the poignant freshness of the April day. He was alone for the moment. It was Tim's day off. Petter was behind, in the little office. A shiny little car drew up to the gas pump. He went forward and filled the tank, scarcely looking at the girl at the wheel. She said, as she handed him a bill:

"Hello. Do you remember me?"

He looked up at her and frowned and said: "No." But he did remember her. "*You're the biggest boy in the class and I'm the littlest girl.*" And simultaneously with this memory, flashed another. A slovenly woman weeping, talking stridently, blowing her nose in her apron, carrying baked potatoes in her apron to the table. . . .

"I went to school with you," the girl said, and then, with an exasperated sigh: "Nobody remembers me."

He mumbled: "Sorry," and turned to go. She put a gloved hand on his arm. "I think I need oil. Will you look, please?"

He looked. She didn't need oil. "Then will you see if I need water?" she said softly. He unscrewed the cap of the radiator rapidly.

"Full," he said and waited. She looked around, her eyes meditative. "Are my tyres all right?" Without moving he answered: "Yes."

"It's a new car," she explained, "and I guess I'm like a mother with a new baby about it." She caressed the wheel, then looked up at him again. Her eyes were very dark and very clear. They were pretty. The rest of her face wasn't much—a rather thin nose, a rather thin mouth, and thin cheeks. She smiled, showing what seemed to him, suddenly, an undue number of strong, white teeth for so thin a face, and then threw off her brake. "Well, I'll see you again," and she was off.

Johnny looked after her. She had been as definite as though she were making an appointment. He thought: "What the hell!" and went back to the garage.

For a week, she stopped every day. She went to Normal School in Loring, she told him. She was going to be a school teacher. He noticed that she didn't speak to him when there were others around the garage. It made him surlier with her. She said to him one day rapidly and softly:

"You seem angry with me. Please don't be. You see, I really want to become acquainted. I'm really

awfully anxious to know you. Do you think it forward of me?"

He stared at her, then blurted out:

"You'll be getting into trouble one of these days." He wanted to recall the words before they were well out of his mouth. She might think he was being fresh, whereas the words had sprung from a sudden realization of how delicate and innocent she looked.

She smiled gravely and whispered:

"Do you mean I'll be getting into trouble with you?"

"No!" His denial was startled.

Their eyes met. He experienced a shock. He heard her say: "I'll see you to-morrow," and she was gone. But she didn't come the next day. She didn't come for a week. When she finally drew up to the gas pump, Tim started forward, but Johnny, as though not noticing his intention, reached her first.

"Busy, aren't you?" he said brusquely, filling the tank.

"Why, no," she replied. "Not busier than usual. Why? Because I haven't been around?" She smiled warmly. "I'll be around again to-morrow."

Again she didn't appear. He didn't give a damn whether he saw her or not, but what was the idea of saying she would come. He would have nothing further to say to her. He didn't like that kind. He'd picked up "decent" girls before. Free and easy as you like, but just try and take them at their

face value! There was something about this one. . . . She looked a man straight in the eye, she never blushed or giggled, there was a certain . . . a certain self-possession—that was it!—about her, despite her hurried softness and occasional timidity. Just the same she would be getting into trouble some day. . . .

It was many days before she passed again. Johnny merely nodded to her and bent over the tank. She said nothing, seemed lost in thought. She paid him and turned the key of the motor. Johnny's heart sank a little. He put his foot on the running board and glared at her. She cast a swift glance at Tim within the garage, then looked at Johnny pleasantly.

"What are you sore about?" he demanded.

"Sore! Me! Why, what do you mean?"

"All this talk about making my acquaintance. If you were kidding, say so, and that's that with me. If you weren't kidding, what's the idea of freezing me out now?"

"You're the one that was freezing me out. Glowering and scowling and sulking every time I said a word to you. It's true I wanted to know you. It's you that's put me off."

"Well——" He swallowed nervously. "I—I'm sorry." He made a gesture as though dismissing all that. "You—you want to meet me to-night?"

She hesitated. He flushed and said in an ugly voice: "You can't, eh? Afraid you'll be seen with a

fellow whose old man knifed his old woman. Why didn't you think of that when you started out to get acquainted?"

She looked at him in tolerant chiding. "Let me think, Johnny," she said, and sat pondering.

She had not even thought of protesting, of reassuring him, as though his ugly words were an irrelevant outburst without meaning or interest. He waited, staring, dumb and fascinated, at her thin, thoughtful face.

"You know the road where the trolley line breaks into West Duffield. It's about two miles from here." She spoke with satisfaction as though everything were well-arranged in her mind. "Well, you take the trolley and get out right at the fork, then turn right and walk till the street ends. You can't miss the spot. The last lamp post is there. You be there at eight o'clock. I'll be there in the car."

She sought the gas with her foot. Then on an afterthought: "And don't be silly, Johnny," she said, as if reading his thoughts. "Of course I can't be seen with you. I don't care who murdered who in your family. But I've not got only myself to think of. You'll see, I'll explain it to you to-night. At eight o'clock, remember."

She drove off. Johnny thought resentfully: "I won't go. If she doesn't want to be seen with me, she doesn't have to see me at all."

VI

She was late. She apologized as he got into the car. "I never get anywhere on time. People are always angry with me. I don't mind waiting, myself. I can wait forever. I hope you're not angry with me, Johnny."

He said: "No," though he had been furious. She started to drive down the wide, dirt road toward the woods. He glanced at her, looked away, then glanced again. Her profile held him. He hadn't noticed it before. It was sharp cut, and yet it had something warm and tender about it; as if it had been done not with austere economy but by a bold, sure hand in a single and passionate stroke. The nostril had a pronounced curve. It was at once very proud and somehow very hungry. It fascinated him. He had never thought of anyone's nostrils before. The curve he watched now seemed actually to give expression to her face, as eyes might or lips.

She stopped the car where the road got narrow and faced him.

"Well, here we are," she said briskly. They sat

looking at each other for a few minutes, then: "What are you thinking of, Johnny?"

"I—I was looking at your face."

She gave a little, deprecatory laugh. "I hope you like it."

"It's different." He didn't know whether he liked it or not. It certainly wasn't his idea of a pretty face.

She folded her hands tightly. "Oh, I'm so glad we're here. Look at me again, Johnny."

He looked at her, suddenly tongue-tied and ill-at-ease.

"I like to feel your eyes on me. They make me feel—they sort of burn me. You know, I can't imagine them dead. I can imagine the rest of you lying cold and quiet, but your eyes would be alive and seeing everything."

"That's funny," he muttered.

"Yes," she agreed. "Johnny, do you remember when I spoke to you in school, years ago?"

"Yes."

"I'm so glad you remember. You didn't seem to like me. But I knew you would some day. I was afraid, sometimes, you would go away. When your mother and father died, I used to pray to God not to let you go away. I'd sort of hold on to you inside with all my might. And sometimes I'd threaten Him. I'd sit in church and keep saying under my breath: 'God, you'll be sorry if you let him go. God, you'll be sorry if you let him go'."

Her hand dropped on his. It had weight, it had a curious weight.

"I used to think of you all the time. Whatever I'd be thinking or doing, you'd be there, too. Except when I was at the dentist's, when he was drilling my teeth. I'd forget you then. And when mother was sick. I'd forget you then, too. And then when I'd remember you afterwards, I couldn't think of anything else, the way I could other times. It was as if you'd been away and just come back and I wasn't quite used to you yet."

The night was black. There was not a single star.

"Johnny, do you think I'm bold?"

"No."

"I'm so glad. I don't know what I'd do if you thought me forward and bold. I'm not really but —— We're going to be happy, Johnny. We're going to be terribly happy. Do you feel it, too?"

"I—I don't know."

"We will. We will. . . . I used to imagine you kissing me. I used to imagine you holding me tight, so tight, I used to hold my breath as if you were really stopping my breathing. I—I used to dream about you."

There was a long silence. Her soft voice, coming again, seemed to breast it rather than break it.

"I dreamed about you, Johnny, and whatever happens—between you and me—can't be any more wrong—than the way I've dreamed about you."

Her eyes had no colour at all. They were part of the black night. There had never been a night so black. Blackness was not a mystery. It was a deep and incredible intimacy. It was the weight of a hand. It was the soft falling of a voice. . . .

"Nothing wrong, Johnny. Not if you're right about it with yourself."

She lifted his hand and placed it about her waist. Vaguely he realized that it was very small and a very tender waist, and the muscles of his arms stiffened instinctively so as not to crush it. She leaned her head against his shoulder.

"We're alone in the world. It's the beginning of the world. . . . It's so dark."

He stirred. A queer uneasiness moved him. She was suddenly separated from the night. He felt her with startling distinctness, curved against him. He was aware of the tenseness of her body. He wanted to take his arm away, but she caught at it and tightened it about her.

"Tighter, tighter." Her lips moved against his cheek. She shivered. In a sort of stolid dismay, he began to stroke her hair. . . . Nothing so little and so light and so alive had ever been in his arms before. Nothing so soft as her hair had ever been under his touch. Nothing had ever pounded through him like the violent and drunken beat of her heart. It seemed to tear his own from its moorings. He tried desperately to hold it down, to hold it down. . . .

"Why don't you kiss me? Why don't you kiss me, Johnny? Don't you want to?"

"Yes." His arms forgot her fragility, dangerously. But he didn't bend his mouth to hers. He wasn't going to. She was innocent. She was helpless. She didn't know. Her very arms around his neck were like a frantic, frightened baby's. Her face, as close as it was, as dark the night, was sharply exquisite, a white denial of all that was impure, of all that was sin. . . . She clung to him as if the world had dropped from under her feet. . . . She was fresh and sweet and clean and kind as no other woman had ever been. She didn't belong in these years. He mustn't . . . She grew rigid, her heart knocking against him. She seized his head in her hands and pulled it down. Her mouth against his was a frenzy. He was caught, spun dizzily, and sank in it, thinking:

"What a shame! What a God-damn shame!"

VII

In the following week she passed by twice and nodded, not stopping. Johnny could scarcely believe his senses the first time he saw her car roll steadily by. He had made no move, not a muscle in his face had stirred. But inside he felt arrested, shocked, trampled upon. Memory was blinding for a moment. It had happened all right. She had lain in his arms out there beyond West Duffield, she had been his with a terrible fire, she had held him close afterwards, murmuring, caring for him almost as if she were healing ravages she had made in him. And now she nodded coolly, passing him by, delicate-faced, serene, one of the nicer Duffield girls on her way from Normal School in Loring. He felt outraged. He felt as though she had somehow deceived him and was laughing at him. He was the one who should be laughing at her. He had despoiled her innocence, if indeed innocent she had been. She had given herself to him easily enough, why not to others? But the way she had first approached him. The way she had talked to him. He burned suddenly to know if she were innocent, if he had been the first one she had loved.

He saw her late Saturday afternoon on High Street. She was talking to a tall, lanky youth with reddish hair. Johnny recognized him. He had been in his class in school. His name was Mort Sutter and his father had a law office on High Street. She saw Johnny, but she made no sign, and he, as if impelled by some irresistible command, walked on as if not recognizing her. He had been on the point of smiling to her. His heart was dark with resentment, quick with fury—and a little sick afterward.

The days went by and there was no further sign of her. He began to think constantly: "To hell with her! There are plenty of others. The only difference is I didn't pay for her." He longed to tell her this. He longed to turn the memory of the hours they had spent together to ashes in her mouth. He framed insults to her and determined to say them to her casually and coarsely the next time she stopped for gas.

She passed by a second time, nodding, cool and impersonal. A malevolence possessed Johnny. Tim was near him. He leaned over and said sardonically:

"See that skirt? Just passed in the blue Chev?"

"Yeah. What about her?"

"Had her. Out in the woods outside of West Duffield."

Tim stared at him, his jaw dropping. A lewd warmth crept into his eyes. "No kiddin'!"

"No kidding. She's easy." Johnny's mouth went

suddenly dry. He wetted his lips. "She made a date out there by the gas pump. Last week. Met her on Wednesday. She wasn't so bad."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Tim looked at Johnny in awed admiration. "Her! She's one of the Willis girls. Who woulda thought it! And her goin' to be a school teacher! Can you imagine that? Gee," he leaned forward, furtive and confidential, "I bet there are dozens of them right in this town. Gosh, you never can tell. She don't look so hot."

"She's plenty hot." A little pulse was ticking queerly in Johnny's temple. His voice was hoarse. He cleared his throat and said: "Mum's the word, Tim. She—she's not a bad kid and I don't want to make any trouble for her. Keep it to yourself."

"Sure, sure," Tim promised understandingly. "Think I'd blab? Holy mackerel! The Willis kid. And her goin' to be a school teacher." He laughed jovially. "Say, Johnny, you're the boy, all right. You can worm 'em out. Listen——" His eyes glistened and he began to ask questions. Johnny answered them, driving himself through a sudden little panic. When he finally turned away, he was thinking grimly that he never wanted to see Catherine Willis again, even passing by in her blue car.

Three days later, she stopped. He went to the pump, driven by Tim's rich wink. Sternly, he filled the tank, took her money and turned away. Her voice fluttered at the back of his head.

"Why, Johnny!" He faced her. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"I thought you were angry. Can you meet me tonight?"

"No."

Her eyes, on his face, were puzzled and anxious.

"Don't you want to?"

"No."

"Yes, you do, Johnny. You're angry. Because I haven't stopped before. You know we've got to be careful. That man, not Mr. Petter, the other one, is looking at us now."

"I can't stop people from looking."

"No, that's why we've got to avoid giving them anything to talk about or think about. Johnny, meet me, please, at eight o'clock."

"I've got to go to school."

"Can't you miss one night?"

He didn't answer, looking doggedly down.

"I'll be there waiting for you, Johnny."

He said: "All right," chiefly because he wanted her to go, wanted her to get out of sight of Tim's peering eyes. When she had driven off, he hung around the pump until he observed Tim busy with some work. He managed to avoid Tim the rest of the day.

That evening he took her in his arms at once. He was going to waste no time talking. He was through

with that bunk. She yielded herself silently. It was he who said afterward:

"Why didn't you talk to me all the week?"

She sighed a little. "That's what I was going to tell you about last time, but I forgot. It's my mother and sister and—and everybody else, Johnny. They think this—this is wrong. I can't have them, I can't have anybody knowing about us. I know it's going to be hard, Johnny, but we must be careful. We've got to be extra careful now that there's something really to find out about us."

"Do you have to cut me dead on the street? Do we have to be that careful?"

"Yes, Johnny. Mort would have wondered at my knowing you—You see it's not only our making love here. Mother would object to my even knowing you on account of your father."

His gorge rose at the reference to his father, but something else rose above it for the moment. He burst out:

"What the hell difference does it make if this fellow does know that you know me. It's none of his damn' business."

"Johnny, don't swear at me. I don't mind if you swear, but not directly at me."

"I wasn't swearing at you. But who the—who is he anyway?"

"Nobody. But you know how this town is. If people see us talking, they'll notice it. And then

they'll notice me stopping at the garage, and the next thing you know everybody'll be talking. We can't be too careful."

He said abruptly: "Is this fellow a boy friend of yours?"

"Mort? No," she said calmly.

He was silent for a moment. Then, in a blurt: "Am I the first one you ever really loved?"

She said "Yes," in the same tone as before.

"How many other fellows have you said that to?"

She was so unhurried about it, he thought she merely wanted to change her position. He realized with a start that she was turning the key in the motor, throwing off the brake. He grasped her arm and pulled her face to face with him.

"Listen to me," he said harshly. "You lead a fellow on and then you bring him out here and chuck yourself at him and—and make him think you're crazy about him. And then you cut him dead for a week as if—as if it was all in a day's work and why should you remember him in particular. No, you're going to listen to me! You cut him, talking to another fellow just like—just like you talked to him, same expression, same voice, everything. What the hell is he to think?"

She pulled her arm away in a swift jerk, then sat perfectly still.

"He's not to think anything. You're not to think anything!"

"You can't stop people from thinking!"

"If you can't help thinking such things about me, we'll say good-bye right now." She stepped on the gas. He said desperately:

"Wait a minute!" She faced him again. She was not the girl he had kissed but a few minutes ago, nor the girl who passed him on the way to school, friendly and cool. This was a girl you couldn't touch, this was a girl you couldn't speak lightly of to anyone, this was a girl you couldn't make laugh or cry or anything else in the world she didn't want to do. He stared at her, noting with vague alarm the sharp lift of her nostril. She said finally:

"Johnny, I thought we were going to be so happy. It's terrible to think you're going to spoil it all."

"It's you that's spoiling it."

"Oh, no. It's you. You know I can't help it the way things are. I'll probably have to act coldly to you again, in the street. Oh, don't you see, I don't care about your mother and father, what difference can they make to me? It's my mother and sister and other people. And I can't have anybody talking or even thinking things about me."

"It's a funny thing the way you are, doing just as you like and thinking nothing wrong and then scared to death people will talk about you. Scared even to be seen saying hello to me."

"No, it's not that I'm scared." She twisted her hands distressfully. "It's just that I get furious

when anyone is nasty about me. Look, when I was only about fourteen, some boy gave me a push, just a little push. I think he did it to show me he liked me. Well, I nearly killed him. It was awful. Of course, I'm not that way now, I wouldn't do anything. But I get just as furious at anything that isn't—well, respectful. I can't help it."

He thought suddenly of Tim. He said defiantly:

"I don't care what people think of me, or say of me. I don't give a damn. They can't hurt me."

"Well, they can me. I don't care whether they like me or not, either, but they've got to be respectful. And I've got to have things peaceful, not worry my mother and so on. Why, it isn't necessary. We can manage without it!"

He looked at her, baffled and unhappy.

She said earnestly: "You think I'm funny, but look. If I were a queen or somebody with a lot of power, I'd do what I liked and not care a bit, and if anybody wasn't respectful to me, I'd simply chop off their head. But I'm not. So I'm careful nobody knows what I do. It's the only way, Johnny, if you want to be happy and have things pleasant at the same time."

He didn't know why the words thrilled him—about her being a queen and chopping off the heads of people who weren't respectful to her. But he did know that the word "careful" in her mouth gave him a curiously stifled feeling, a sense of confinement.

"I don't like being so damn' careful."

"Well, it's the only way," she said patiently. "So if you don't like it, we'd better not meet again."

He said, a pang shooting through him: "That would be easy for you, wouldn't it?"

"No, Johnny, but it would be the only way."

"Everything you said the other night about my being so—so wonderful——"

She interrupted him. "I meant it. Oh, we could be so happy together. We must be happy together." She caught his hand and held it against her heart. "Johnny, you like me, don't you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you will in time and then you'll be awfully sorry you thought ugly things about me, won't you?"

"I don't know."

"Johnny, look at me. You can see in my eyes how I love you. I show it and tell you because I'm so sure you'll love me, too, in time. Look how my heart is beating under your hand." She paused attentively, as if listening to the heart beats. "See, it says: 'John-ny, John-ny.' It's always saying that. Do you think it says anything else just because I happen to be talking to somebody else, or because I pass you by as if I didn't know you?"

He looked down at her in confusion. He didn't know what to say. He made a sudden movement toward her. She said: "Wait," clasping his other

hand. Her soft voice trembled a little as she went on. "Here we are, we might be in a world of our own and it's more beautiful than I can dream about and we're happy in an extraordinary way. Are you going to spoil it all because things outside of it can't be helped—and because I—maybe, was a little bold?"

He was silent for a long time, holding her dark eyes intently. He said finally:

"I'm the first you have loved?"

"Yes." Her voice sounded a little tired.

"And there'll be no others?"

"No."

"I'm sorry—what I said."

"We'll forget it."

There was little sleep for Johnny that night. He lay in bed with the thought of what he had told Tim cold and sharp at his heart.

VIII

They found a little clearing deep in the woods. Somewhere near by ran a little brook. They couldn't see it, but it purred in their ears a lazy contentment. Above their heads was a handful of sky; about them trees. A community of trees; patriarchs and slender striplings, trees like young mothers, rich with leaf and tenderly spreading, trees spare and withered, sad spinsters of the forest, trees that were pert girls, trees that were prim girls, trees proud and trees that fawned to the wind; and trees coupled close like lovers whispering to each other in the breeze. The scent of arbutus came to them first, lingering with them through the April evening and then all the other wood flowers, each in their season, offerings to their love. The grass bowed down, making a smooth, green bed, and there they lay as if they had found an unpeopled world and were having their way with it to their heart's content.

It was hard to spend the long, lovely evenings in a classroom. Hard for both . . . and he played truant often, besides meeting her regularly the one night he was free from school and on Sunday after-

noons when he wasn't on duty at the garage. On Sundays she took the trolley, too, fearing that the little blue car might be noticed in the daylight, parked by the roadside. She got out at a different stop each time and walked to the pavement's edge. He learned to wait patiently for her, even to read while he waited, only reproaching her when she was much later than usual. Once, late in June, he waited in vain. He felt less angry than frightened and walked by her house, peering in, bitter with her caution, bitter with the chains his mother and father had put on him, bitter with the hours that were lost to him, forever lost. But she passed by the garage the next day, and whispered an excuse to him and said she would be at the pavement's edge that night, and so he regained the hours, feeling that he had turned time back in its course and could do anything else in the world because of her love.

He had forbidden her to stop at the garage and even to pass by if she could help it. She had said quickly:

"Do you think anyone suspects anything?"

He had replied uneasily: "I don't know. Mr. Petter, maybe. It's better not to, anyway." He had felt like telling her about Tim, about what he had told Tim; sometimes he couldn't bear the weight of it alone. But he hadn't dared. He said instead to Tim, afterward, looking him fiercely in the eyes:

"What I told you about—the Willis girl, Tim—that was a lie."

"You mean about having—her?"

Johnny went white. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He held his arms straight by his sides with a heartbreaking effort. "It's a lie," he said thickly.

Tim snickered. "Aw, go on. What's the matter, afraid I'll blab?" Ever since he had told him about the Willis girl, Johnny had steadily refused to go on excursions with him to Loring. He was apparently getting it for nothing, the lucky son-of-a-gun. And where else would he be getting it if not from the Willis girl?

"It's a lie," Johnny repeated. "I tried and she wouldn't and I was sore, so that's why I said it."

Tim shrugged, looking curiously at him. "If it's a lie, it's a lie, and if it ain't a lie, it ain't a lie," he said amiably.

"It's a lie!" Tim retreated a step involuntarily from the flame that shot out of Johnny's eyes. "O.K.," he said. "Whatcha gettin' sore about?"

Johnny walked away. It mattered little after all if Tim believed him now or not. He had given her over irrevocably to Tim's mind for pollution. For a black moment, their passion was an evil thing, evil and ugly as the word Tim had used to describe it. Foul words and obscene pictures flooded his image of her, threading a sharp and shameful tinge through

his blood and filling his heart with despair. Hatred of her mingled with hatred of Tim and bound the two together in an unbearable proximity. He steadied himself with an effort. The nightmare faded. He was not comforted. But now he hated only himself and Tim for having told Tim, and that he could bear.

Summer passed, and in the fall Johnny matriculated at the University. He had failed to get a scholarship and had not enough money to attend classes in the daytime. He continued working at the garage, studying as before, at night. He took occasional nights off from classes, in order to meet her. She scolded him for it, gently. But he made up for such lapses by studying feverishly, in the morning before the day's work, rising at dawn, in every spare minute at the garage, at meals, and in the trolley going to West Duffield. He couldn't, after seeing her throughout the summer, three and four times a week, resign himself to a single week night, and an occasional Sunday.

The autumn cool became edged with menace.

"What'll we do when it's cold, Cathy?" They were lying on their backs watching the faded blue of the October sky. It was Sunday afternoon.

"It's not cold yet, so don't let's worry. Look, isn't that the tiredest looking little cloud you ever saw. It looks simply too tired to drift any further. It must have drifted here from a long way off."

"To hell with the cloud," said Johnny. He was permitted to swear so long as he didn't swear directly at her. "It'll be cold soon enough and this is no place for winter."

She said lazily: "Let's separate for the winter and pine away for each other. It'll be romantic."

"I'd pine away only too well," he said grimly. "No, my Cathy, I get enough of pining for you, as it is. Tell me what we'll do when it's cold."

She sighed. "I hate to think of practical things when I'm with you. However——" She put her arm across his chest and his fingers interlocked with hers. She said, still looking at the little cloud above them:

"We'll have to meet in Loring. And go to a hotel."

He frowned. He had thought of that too. He said, not pleasantly:

"Some dump in a dirty street with the clerk looking you over with a grin while I sign the 'Mr. and Mrs.' in the register. We couldn't even go to a decent place. We might be seen."

"Is that what they do?" she asked, frowning too.

"Yes, that's what they do."

"It is unpleasant. Oh, dear. But what else can we do?"

He blurted out: "We might get married and make love in our own bed like other people."

"You know we can't now, Johnny."

"No," he said bitterly. "Not with your mother

and sister and the neighbours and the whole damn' town counting more with you than I do."

They had been over that before. She said nothing now, having found silence more effective with him in this mood than any words. He said after a moment:

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. But for God's sake, Cathy, when will I be able to see you when I want and have you when I want and be able to stop you in the street and talk to you the way—the way plenty of other fellows can do?"

"Johnny, dear! Must we go over that again? I told you, the minute it's possible. When you get through college and started in a profession, I can reason with mother and everything will be all right. Be patient."

He fell into a moody silence. She said, to placate him:

"It won't be so bad at a hotel, dear. And we can stay all night sometimes."

"How can you do that?"

"I'll tell mother I'm staying overnight with one of the girls from school. She won't mind. She feels safe about me."

He laughed shortly. She said calmly: "And she's right in feeling safe about me, Johnny."

"What she doesn't know doesn't hurt her, is that it?"

"I don't like that, Johnny."

"I didn't mean anything."

"All right, then, if you didn't. But don't you see, Johnny, however mistaken mother is about my being so quiet and never wanting to look at a boy, she's right in not worrying about me. I'll never get into trouble or make trouble whatever I do. I'm so careful."

"Oh, careful!"

"It's a good thing to be, Johnny, the way things are. Now, for instance, my sister Sophy. Did you ever notice her, Johnny? She's pretty. She's tall and well-built and she has the loveliest complexion. Mother's always worrying about her because she's so pretty and giggles a lot and is sort of free in her ways. Well, Sophy would never let a boy kiss her. Not even if she was crazy about him. But she'd do foolish things and she'd let almost anybody say anything to her because she doesn't know how to stop them. And mother's right worrying about her."

"Seems to me a girl is safe enough if she doesn't let a boy kiss her."

"No. Oh, no. She needn't do anything and just by her ways cause suspicion and talk and so make trouble."

"What's the difference if people talk? If she doesn't do anything, she's safe," he persisted.

"No, Johnny, no! You do what you like. You do what you like. That's the important thing. And

then you're just a little sensible and keep it to yourself and everything is perfect all around."

He moved uneasily. There was something wrong. . . . She pulled his head over on her breast.

"Come on, Johnny. Be happy. I love to see you happy. It suits you. It makes you look so handsome." She caressed him. "You're so big. I think it would take me a day to kiss all of you. You could do me in an hour, long kisses too. Think, Johnny, of sleeping together all night. I'm looking forward to it, I don't care if it is in a hotel, aren't you?"

He admitted in an absent voice, "Yes." He was thinking of it. He was picturing to himself how it would be holding her in his arms for eight, nine, ten hours. She might fall asleep and he could watch her thin, exquisite face and feel a tender guardianship and a deep content almost as if nothing could part them, with her quiescent in sleep and him wakeful and holding her. . . .

He drew her closer. Her eyes, after a while, grew darker, wider . . . profoundly impersonal. He stared into them for a moment in a sort of desolation, a sort of terror, as though her unseeing eyes denied him not only identity but existence itself. Would it always be like this? Would she always seem infinitely separated from him at the moments when her body struggled to get closer to his, closer, impossibly close. . . .

IX

It was worse than they had thought, going to the mean little hotel on the outskirts of Loring. The dim and musty lobby, the clerk's complaisant eyes, the drab and none-too-clean room in which they were at last alone—they dragged at his joy, an ugly weight. Other women . . . those other women . . . and Cathy! His eyes tried to avoid the bed. Wide, dingy, dominating the room. He knew it creaked. . . . He wanted to take her away at once. He wanted suddenly to beat her, to punish her. . . .

Her evident dislike of the place appeased him somewhat. The disdainful set of her head, the proud lift of the nostril, her measured and oblivious tread —they restored his peace, his deep exultation in her. The place was repugnant to her, it gave her offence. She sent a cold and grave glance about the room, as if withdrawing herself from it, and said:

"It's horrid, Johnny. Do you think we can stand it?"

"We won't come again."

But they did go again and again, all through the winter. For if distaste was stronger than they had

anticipated, the delight they found was infinitely keen and infinitely soft. On evenings when there was no school for him, they went to a movie, obscure and safe in the squalid quarter of the town. Afterward they had a cup of hot chocolate at a drug store or cheap restaurant. Then out in the cold, bleak street again, they walked briskly to the hotel, feeling the frost sharp on their faces and their hands warm in each other's. She tried to match his long stride and failing, took a breathless little skip every other step until, laughing and delighted with her littleness, he shortened his stride. Into the hotel they came, conquering its staleness and dreariness with their fresh and lovely youth. In their room upstairs, she darted about, putting away their coats, turning down the coverlets, patting the pillows, placing a pitcher of water by the bedside, while he watched her.

A girl, queenly and exquisite. . . . Cathy, Cathy! . . . A house spotlessly clean and spacious. A life shining and beautiful and proud. . . . There was a mistake. Things had got mixed up. She had come too soon. She didn't belong in these years. This room. His mother and father. The house on River Road. The garage. Tim . . . Tim. . . . Things had got mixed up.

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered but her.

"You're like a friend, Cathy. I've never had a friend. I've never talked to anyone like this."

"Poor darling. You must have been terribly lonely."

"I don't know. I didn't care much what happened, everything was so wrong from the start. I—I was planning ahead all the time. To change things from the start."

"Well, you will."

"No, not exactly from the start," he said vaguely. "I've got you now."

He told her about his mother and father. "Most of the time he said nothing while she ranted. He'd sit bent over and work. He had thick hair and the back of his neck had a hollow in it. But sometimes I guess he couldn't bear it and he'd answer her back. She liked it when he answered her back. She couldn't bear his sitting quiet and not noticing her. She'd work herself up in a rage, but you could see she liked it."

She shook her head gravely in the darkness. "What do you suppose made her like that?"

"Oh, a lot of things. She was always saying how poor we were and how hard she had to work and he wouldn't go to church with her. Almost anything would start her off, the meat being tough or her dress maybe tearing, or a dish breaking. Anything. And"—his voice lowered—"he wasn't a man."

"Who?"

"My father. He wasn't a man. They didn't sleep together."

"Good Lord!" She raised herself a little and stared down at him. "But—but——"

"He couldn't . . . you know . . . She used to laugh at him. It used to make me sick."

"But—you mean he couldn't make love to her?"

"Yes. I don't know why . . . but it was true enough." They were both silent. He could feel her heart beating. She said after a minute, her voice full and hushed:

"How very dreadful! Oh, she must have been a terrible woman. She must have driven him crazy. Do you suppose she was very passionate and hated him because of that."

"I guess so," he said heavily. "But it would have been hell anyway, I suppose. She had an awful temper and she was just naturally mean. But that made it worse, I guess."

"But, Johnny——" she paused, her brow puckered. "What I can't understand is how they could have had you—your father being the way he was."

"Well, he wasn't always like that. He got that way. I don't know how. He was a lot older than she was, too. But I don't know——"

"Still—you're so big and strong and splendid. Do you suppose she—she might have gone with some other man—— Maybe he wasn't your father."

"No," he said shortly. "She was very religious. And she used to talk all the time about other women. She used to throw it up to him about her being so

good and pure and all to no purpose—she used to say some awful things."

"I don't blame him for killing her. You know, I saw him sometimes and I felt so sorry for him. There was something about him——"

He saw vividly the limp and beaten little man, the large and bitter woman, and an old shame swept over him unbearably. He cried: "Don't let's talk of them any more. They don't belong to me. I don't want them!"

She held him closely. She whispered: "No, Johnny, they don't. I used to think sometimes you were born of a wish. A wish people had had for something magnificent. A wish maybe your father had had. You were his wish. He put everything into you, all the manhood he had and all he hoped for of love and—and adventure and everything. There must have been something very lovely about him, something maybe he didn't realize himself——"

He interrupted her. "I don't care. They're both dead and I'm glad they're dead. They've nothing to do with me. They're not mine!"

She kissed him softly. His arms tightened about her. He said: "You're mine, Cathy. You're my people. You're everything."

The spring gave them back their clearing in the woods. Their first meeting there, on a Sunday in March, was a homecoming.

"God, Cathy, it's fresh here. Smell." He breathed deeply, excitedly.

"And listen to the brook, Johnny."

"I hear it. It limps a little."

"It hasn't quite thawed yet."

"And look at our tree, the one you said was like a young mother. She's not what she was last year."

"Give her another month."

"Cathy, we've got to have a baby. When we're married."

"I can't imagine myself with a baby."

"No, but we'll have it just the same, a boy. It'll look like you."

"Oh, no, it'll look like you."

"I want it to look like you."

"But, Johnny, it can't. It's got to be big and strong like you. Imagine it growing up my size."

"That's right. I wasn't thinking of him growing up. But it's got to *be* like you. It's got to hold its head like you and it's got to have eyes like yours and a nose like yours, and it's got to laugh like you and talk like you and everything."

"Well, let's make it a girl, then."

"No, I want it a boy."

"Maybe twins," she laughed.

"No, I want it just one. You and me in one." He looked at her with brooding anxiety. "It seems too good to be true, doesn't it, Cathy?"

"Oh, no. You've got three more years at college, and then a year or two to get settled in your profession, and by that time we can have lots of things arranged."

"It seems an awfully long time."

"Not if we're seeing each other all the time."

His face clouded. "I know, but—— Cathy, what if your mother won't like your marrying me, even then?"

"She won't mind then. Everything'll be forgotten by that time, and with you having an education and a profession, it won't be hard to persuade her."

"But what if she does mind?" he persisted.

"Johnny, darling, we'll worry about it then. Let's be happy now. Everything's so simple and lovely, don't let's spoil it. Things will shape out the way we want them if we're just patient and careful."

He stifled the protest that rose to his lips. It was their first day in the clearing and he would not spoil it with a quarrel.

It was an unhappy spring. Her mother was ailing —she had a weak heart—and she was obliged to miss many trysts. Sometimes she let him know, stopping at the garage in the morning. But sometimes it was unexpected, whatever prevented her from meeting him, and he would wait and wait at the pavement's edge, till, sick at heart and raging, he gave up hope. Then he would walk slowly past her house, trying to catch a glimpse of her and

perhaps an explanation. Once he saw her on the porch with a gay little group. Her happy laugh, reaching him, smote him to the heart; he was filled with a sort of terror and incredulity. There were boys in the group. He retraced his steps and, almost stopping at her gate, tried to make out their faces. She had disappeared. Her sister Sophy, sitting on the top step, was saying something in which he caught her name.

There was a bitter quarrel the next time they met. She sat, pulling idly at the grass, answering him patiently.

"Mother wasn't feeling well and wanted me home. Mary Wolven came over with her cousins and then a boy from Sophy's class dropped in. Even if mother had been well, it would have looked funny for me to go away."

"And it would have been too bad, you were enjoying yourself so much," he said bitterly.

"What do you want me to do?" she said simply. "Sit and mope?"

"Who were the boys?"

"Nobody in particular."

"They've been to your house before. You've been with them before."

"Well, what if I have!"

"You never told me."

She moved restlessly. There was a pained look on her face. "Johnny, I can't account for every

minute I spend away from you. It's too much. It's like—like prison!"

He was appalled. "Like prison!" She rose quickly and put her arms around him.

"You don't understand. Oh, Johnny, why do you have to be like this? Why can't you leave things alone? I love you, I tell you, I love you. Isn't that enough? Some day we'll be together always, but —even then you mustn't—you mustn't——"

"I mustn't what?"

"Keep after me all the time. With questions, with quarrels. It's bad. It's——Oh, Johnny, let's just be happy. Let's just love and be happy."

They didn't make it up until their next meeting. The summer was more tranquil. In August she went away for a week's visit to a school friend. During this week, he struck up a nodding acquaintance with her sister. Seeing her in the street one day, he was moved by an irresistible impulse, a longing to establish contact, however remote, with Cathy, and he smiled stiffly. Sophy returned the greeting modestly. The encounter gave him a feeling of lightheartedness. He told Cathy about it when she returned.

She said: "Yes, Sophy told me she'd seen you a couple of times. She thinks you're very good-looking."

He was pleased. He chuckled. "She doesn't know it but she's going to be my sister-in-law."

"She'll certainly be surprised."

"I bet *she* wouldn't raise hell about being related to me."

"No. Sophy is romantic. She'd probably be thrilled."

"Oh, Cathy, won't it be wonderful, won't it be wonderful! Everything open, everything free, not giving a damn about anyone. . . ."

"But we don't give a damn about anyone now."

Winter. Empty, hard days of work at the garage. Empty, hard nights of grinding study. He had to get through. He had to get through. "You mustn't waste time with me as you did last year. You nearly failed your exams. You mustn't risk failing this year." He didn't fail. But the winter, and the spring, despite their desperate pace, were a tormented pause—grim cessations of living between rare nights at the hotel, rare hours in the clearing.

And now it was summer again. She had been his for more than two years and she still passed him by on the street as if she didn't know him. It had been summer barely three weeks and she had let him wait, vainly, while she—— God, where had she been! God, what had she been doing! . . .

X

Mrs. Willis had company when Sophy and Grace returned from the drug store—Mrs. Meinhardt, her neighbour next door but one. There was a faint chill in the breeze outdoors, so they sat in the parlour, rocking gently and enjoying a talk. From the porch came the murmur of voices, and, now and then, a duet of giggles.

"That girl Grace works in Sophy's office," Mrs. Willis informed her neighbour. "She's visiting over the week-end. She lives in Loring. I don't know her people but Sophy tells me her father is a bookkeeper. He works in a bank."

"So," said Mrs. Meinhardt. "A bank he works for. What is the name?"

"Simpson," replied Mrs. Willis, who had got it into her head that such was Grace's surname.

"Simpson," repeated Mrs. Meinhardt. "Simpson. No, I don't know any Simpsons in Loring. Are they related maybe to the Simpsons from West Duffield? They raise cows."

"Sophy," called Mrs. Willis through the open window. "Is Grace related to the Simpsons from West Duffield? They raise cows."

"Grace, are you related to the Simpsons from West Duffield?" they heard Sophy ask her friend. "They raise cows."

"No," came Grace's reply in a suppressed giggle.

"No, mother," called Sophy.

"No, she's not related," Mrs. Willis told her neighbour. Mrs. Meinhardt nodded. "I thought not," she said. There was a moment's silence, then Mrs. Meinhardt brought the conversation back to Duffield where it belonged.

"The Lashers are having their house painted again. Every time you look they're having their house painted. Green they've got it now, with white trimmings."

"They've got a new piano," contributed Mrs. Willis placidly.

"What else have they got to do with their money? Children they haven't."

"Poor thing." Mrs. Willis sighed pityingly. "She's been to doctors all over."

"What good are doctors for such a thing. I had eight. Did I go to doctors for them? No."

"No," agreed Mrs. Willis and lent friendly ears to certain familiar particulars of her neighbour's eight confinements. That over, Mrs. Meinhardt drew a breath and said:

"Effie Fox is going steady with Jeff Allen. Seems he can't make up his mind. Last year he was going steady with Carrie Mead."

"Yes, last year he was going with Carrie. What do you suppose put a stop to that?"

"You ask me that, Mrs. Willis! With these boys and girls to-day do you ever know what's going to happen? Time was when you went steady, you went steady. Not now."

"No, not now." Mrs. Willis' eyes, big and blue like Sophy's, became wistful. "Times have changed."

"They have. Did you see the Paxton girl, the younger one? Cut off her hair like a boy. I got such a turn when I saw her, I laughed myself sick. She got red in the face, believe me."

Mrs. Willis clicked her teeth in vague disapproval. "I hear she's going to be engaged to Henry Perkins."

"A pair they'll make. He's a loafer."

"They say he was making up to the middle Petter girl but Mrs. Petter put a stop to it."

"So. It's a wonder. He lets them do what they want, those girls, that Petter. Lucky for them that Mrs. Petter has got some sense."

"Yes. He's a good man, but he is a little foolish, I guess."

"You guess," commented Mrs. Meinhardt, somewhat surprised at such conservatism. "He is."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Willis, anxious to make up for her error, "he has such terrible people working for him. That Tim Risely!"

"And the shoemaker's son. It's a wonder anybody goes there, to that garage."

"The shoemaker's son is now in his third year at the University. I hear he's doing well there."

"So. Let it do him good. He's got a bad look to him, college or no college. I always thought so even before——"

They went over that at some length. Then came a discussion of the postmaster's wife's visiting cousin who wore a different dress every day; of the new car of Lawyer Sutter; of the doctor's wife who was "expecting" her fourth; of the wife of the local editor who was "expecting" her first and ordered clothes from a mail-order house to conceal the fact, only she deceived no one; of the druggist Rorke's visits to the recently widowed Mrs. Stratton; of the fire in the church in West Duffield and the heated controversy that had ended in a fight between two members of the volunteer fire corps as to which should drive the new fire engine to the scene. They wound up with a general review of Duffield births, deaths and marriages within the last year or two, and then Mrs. Meinhardt, with a friendly query, gave over the field entirely to her hostess.

The query had to do with the state of Mrs. Willis' heart. It was not "right," and Mrs. Meinhardt had a mild but unfailing interest in it. She herself had never known a day's illness, so she could give herself wholeheartedly to that of her neighbours. It was

perhaps what endeared her most to Mrs. Willis. She felt that underneath Mrs. Meinhardt's sometimes domineering exterior, beat a truly kindly heart.

She always contrived, with an excited sense of duplicity, to weave in the subject of her daughters on this occasion when she held the floor safely. She was inordinately vain of them, her Sophy was so pretty and her Catherine was so sweet and besides they were the most obedient and loving children in the whole world. Her relation with them was as tender and as sprightly as if they were lovers united to serve her and humour her and take delight in her helplessness and charm. They called her by her given name—unless neighbours were present—and spoiled her and bullied her gently and allowed her to bully them; they teased her and laughed over her and admired extravagantly her gently withered and rosy cheeks, her soft white hair, and every frock she wore to set them off. They adored her without stint and thrilled her as her husband, long since dead, had never done. Her little mistakes about people's names and sewing buttons on the wrong side and throwing away the nut instead of the shell in shelling nuts, delighted her daughters. They had not delighted Herbert Willis, a silent, practical man, the schoolmaster in Duffield when Duffield had boasted only one school. He had tried to correct them, almost till the end. She had married late, at thirty, and had borne her first child a year later. Now, past

fifty, she had the little coquetries and whimsies, the little elations and sense of power that had never been hers as a timid girl or an anxiously humble wife.

Talking now of a recent "spell," she said with the effort she always made to appear casual in speaking of her daughters: "And Catherine still insists on bringing me my breakfast in bed, even though I feel quite well. And she won't let me do a thing around the house. She's always after me to sit down and rest. She, and Sophy, too." She heaved a luxurious little sigh.

"I saw your Catherine on the street Thursday," observed Mrs. Meinhardt. "My, she's thin."

Mrs. Willis looked pained. She could not bear criticism of her daughters. "It's the style now," she said boldly, as if Catherine's thinness were entirely a matter of choice. "All the girls are trying to get thin."

"So," agreed Mrs. Meinhardt. "They're fools."

"Not that Catherine tries to reduce," Mrs. Willis hastened to amend. "She's just naturally slender. She favours Herbert's side. They were all slender."

"Your Sophy, now, a fine girl she's getting to be."

The compliment to Sophy triumphed for the moment over the implication against Cathy. With suppressed excitement Mrs. Willis said:

"Do you remember Sophy as a baby?"

"A pretty baby she was."

Mrs. Willis rocked almost joyously. She had for-

gotten about her heart. She continued indomitably to talk about her daughters until it was time for Mrs. Meinhardt to go. As she went to the porch with her, Sophy and Grace rose and, bidding Mrs. Meinhardt good night, went indoors to make lemonade. Large and impassive, Mrs. Meinhardt looked after them.

"Loring girls, I don't trust them," she remarked. "Pert they are."

Mrs. Willis, little, plump and fluttering, looked up at the oracle in alarm. "Grace seems a well-behaved girl," she said anxiously.

"Seems," said Mrs. Meinhardt. "Maybe she is. Who can tell?"

Mrs. Willis lingered on the porch for a moment after her visitor had gone. It seemed to her now on reflection that Grace had rather a bold look. Her brow puckered, she started indoors, wondering how she could manage a word alone with Sophy immediately.

Just then Cathy came home. It was a little after ten. Mrs. Willis kissed her a little abstractedly.

"How late you are, Catherine," she said trying to sound severe.

"And what a bad little old lady you are, Adelaide," returned Cathy. "You should have been in bed half an hour ago." They went indoors, their arms twined about each other's waists. Sophy hailed her sister gaily. Cathy said:

"Why didn't you make Adelaide go to bed, Sophy. You know what the doctor said."

"Mrs. Meinhardt was here."

"Oh. That woman leads you astray, Adelaide. I'm not going to let her see you again." She laughed and kissed her mother. Mrs. Willis, her eyes shining, her face rosy, said:

"Did you have a nice time at Amelia's, dear?"

"Yes, it was nice. We danced last night and played tennis this morning. Amelia's sister came back from Chicago from a trip and told us the most exciting things. I tried to get away earlier, but they simply wouldn't let me."

Sophy laughed. "Cathy's idea of trying to get away early! She says: 'Well, I shall have to go now.' And somebody says: 'Oh, must you?' And two hours later Cathy says: 'I really must go now.' And two hours later: 'I'm going now.' And maybe four hours later, she goes."

"What an exaggeration," laughed Cathy. "Well, come on, Adelaide, you're going to bed."

"Don't stay up late, Sophy," said Mrs. Willis. "You and Grace must get up early to-morrow."

Sophy promised they would go to bed shortly. Mrs. Willis kissed her and followed Cathy upstairs.

"Catherine," she whispered tensely at the door of her room, "don't you think that girl is pert?"

"Which girl, dear?"

"That Grace Simpson."

"Grace? Her name is Horner, dear, not Simpson."

"Oh, is it? I'm sure Sophy said it was Simpson. But don't you think her pert?"

"She's all right, dear."

"She's got a bold look," insisted Mrs. Willis.

Cathy looked sternly at her mother. "I'm sure Mrs. Meinhardt gave you that idea, Adelaide."

"I've got eyes of my own," declared Mrs. Willis.

Cathy laughed. "Don't you worry about Grace. She won't hurt Sophy. You go to sleep and forget it, darling. I'm going to bed myself. I'm rather tired."

Mrs. Willis went to her room, appeased. She had a great deal of faith in Catherine's judgment and steadiness. If Catherine thought that Sophy was in any danger from Grace's influence, she herself would have said something. Catherine was almost, in a way, the man of the family.

XI

CATHY had taken a bath and was lying in bed, cool and languid, reading, when Sophy, in a blue wrapper, her reddish-blonde hair in a braid down her back, came into the room. Cathy put down her book and smiled. Sophy seated herself on the edge of the bed, circled her arms about her knees and gazed at her reflection in the mirror on the dresser opposite her.

"How was the dance?"

"All right. Amelia fell in love with somebody that I'm sure has a cast in his eye, though I didn't dare say it to her; and she kept me awake most of the night afterward talking of him."

"Wasn't there anybody nice there? Was Mort there?"

"Not at the dance. He came over on Sunday."

"I bet it was because he knew you'd be there."

"I don't know," said Cathy calmly. "Amelia's his cousin and there's no reason why he shouldn't spend a Sunday at her house."

Sophy gave an excited little laugh. "Just the same, he's got a terrible mash on you."

"Don't be silly, Sophy. What did you do to-day?"

"Oh, nothing. Took Grace over to Peggy Bradley's after church and we had a little fun. You should have seen Grace make eyes at Peggy's brothers."

"Adelaide's worried about her. She thinks she's got a bold look. I guess Mrs. Meinhardt thought that up."

Sophy tossed her head indignantly. "That Mrs. Meinhardt is an old busybody. And, honestly, Adelaide believes everything she says. Everything."

"Adelaide believes everything anyone says," observed Cathy. "But don't worry about Grace. I fixed it. I convinced her Grace is quite respectable."

"Respectable!" Sophy gave a restless bounce on the bed. "I wouldn't give a hoot for lots of respectable people in this town."

"Well, don't get so wrought up about it," said Cathy placidly.

"Cathy, I saw Johnny Bogan to-day."

"Yes? Where?"

"Grace and I were going down to Rorke's for a soda after supper and we bumped right into him."

"Oh. What kind of soda did you have?"

"One of those new Specials. Cathy, Johnny came with us."

Cathy frowned. "To Rorke's?"

"Yes. He just came along. He——"

"Sophy, that's awfully foolish. You know how Adelaide would feel about anything like that."

"What could I do?" Sophy's eyebrows shot up vehemently. "He just came along. Anyway, I think it's cruel the way people treat him. It's not his fault what happened years ago, and he's going to college now and trying so hard to live it all down. And I think he's much handsomer than lots of the boys in this town."

"People talk," said Cathy shortly.

"Oh, let them!" said Sophy defiantly.

"And give Adelaide a spell."

Sophy threw her hands out. "I don't do it every day. I probably never will again. Cathy, you're just like Adelaide for worrying."

Cathy smiled and looked at her sister attentively. "You know I'm not, dear. What did you talk about with Johnny Bogan?"

"Nothing much. About walking and the office—you know, Grace didn't like him." Her smile had a triumphant quality. "I know why, too. He didn't fall for her, that's why. Grace is funny that way. She expects every boy she meets to fall for her."

"Well, they won't, so don't worry."

Sophy shrugged elaborately. "I don't care." She rose and went closer to the mirror. She drew the wrapper tightly about her, and put her hands about her waist, trying to span it. She turned slowly, to get a view of her figure from the side and back.

"Do you think I'm fat, Cathy?" she asked.

"No, of course not. You're just right for your height."

"I wouldn't have any potatoes for dinner to-day. I passed them on to Grace when Adelaide wasn't looking." She giggled and turned away from the mirror. "Grace and I nearly choked for a minute, Adelaide so nearly caught us at it."

"You're just right," Cathy repeated absently. "It's getting late, dear. You'd better get to bed."

"All right. Say, Cathy, when are you going to give me another lesson in the car?"

"To-morrow night, if I can."

"We were wishing you were home to-day, so we could have gone riding. Oh, a funny thing. Johnny Bogan was positive he saw us on the Calamy road to-day. He thought he saw you giving me a lesson. He fixed the car for you a couple of times, didn't he?"

"I guess so. I left it at Petter's. What made him think he saw us?"

"I don't know. It must have been somebody else that kind of looked like us. I told him it couldn't have been us because you were in Loring."

Cathy looked gravely at the younger girl. "Sophy, I don't like your talking so freely with strangers."

"My goodness, Cathy, I wasn't talking freely with strangers! What's the matter with you!"

"Well, anyway, you know Adelaide would throw

a fit if she knew you'd been to Rorke's with him. Better not let it slip to her."

"No, of course not."

"And now run along to bed, dear. You've got to get up early."

"All right. Listen, Cathy, Grace invited me over to her house next week-end. She knows some nice boys in Loring and it'll be fun. Get Adelaide to let me go."

"I guess Adelaide would rather you brought Grace here."

"Well, I have, haven't I? Twice already. My goodness, can't I have a little fun once in a while? She lets you stay overnight in Loring. She lets you do what you want."

"I'm older than you, Sophy."

"Three years! My goodness——"

"All right." Cathy interrupted her placatively. "I'll put in a word for you when you ask her."

Sophy sighed with relief and kissed her sister. Her eyes fell on her hand which rested, pinky-white against the dark, even glow of Cathy's arm. "Look," she said, pleased and curious, "how white my hand is against your skin. Gee, you're dark, Cathy. Aren't we different, for sisters?"

"Yes. Good night, dear. Wipe the cold cream off your face thoroughly. There's grease around your nose. I don't see why you use the stuff, with a skin like yours."

"Grace says you never can start too early. She read me an advertisement that said a lot of things about it."

Cathy laughed. "You're more like Adelaide than I am. Believing everything anyone says— Well, run along, dear, it's very late."

When Sophy had gone, Cathy lay thoughtful and silent, a pucker of annoyance between her eyebrows. She gave a short sigh at length, switched off the light and turned on her side. She fell asleep soon after. She could sleep almost at will.

XII

He didn't return her greeting or her smile. She sighed and fell into step beside him. In silence they walked to the woods, his eyes straight ahead of him, hers wandering dreamily over the summer fields. In the clearing she sat down on a rock. He stood, not looking at her, his hands in his pockets. She said:

"Well, Johnny."

His eyes on her were morose, but his voice was quiet, almost humble.

"I'm not going to quarrel with you this time, Cathy. There's not going to be any fight."

She shot him a look of apprehension.

"I couldn't help it, Johnny. I honestly couldn't."

He said after a moment: "Where were you?"

"I was in Loring."

"With whom?"

"With one of the girls from school. At her house."

"What's her name?"

"Amelia Sutter."

A muscle twitched at his mouth. "Is she the one

you were supposed to visit when you met me in Loring?"

"No. What do you mean by that, Johnny?"

He ignored the quiet question. "If you were at her house why couldn't you get away to meet me?"

She made a gesture of helplessness. "You know how I am. I can't seem to get to places and I can't seem to leave once I do get there. I tried to get away and—and before I knew it, it was nine o'clock."

He smiled and swallowed painfully.

"I'm really so sorry, Johnny. If you'll excuse me this time, I promise, I absolutely promise, I'll never disappoint you again—unless, of course, on account of mother."

His earnestness matched hers. There was a dreadful note of wheedling in his voice. "Tell me where you were Saturday and Sunday, Cathy. Don't be afraid to tell me."

She looked at him, startled. "I was in Loring. At Amelia's."

"We're not going to quarrel," he said mechanically. "I just want to know the truth."

She frowned. Her eyes were suddenly cold.

"You're not going to tell me," he said desperately. He took a few aimless paces. He stopped before her, wetting his dry lips. "Cathy, you'd better tell me. You weren't at this girl's house. You've never

stayed overnight in Loring before unless it was with me. You——"

"I have stayed in Loring before."

He stopped short. "When?"

"A few times."

"You never told me."

She clasped her hands tightly. "Must I tell you everything? Every little thing? I don't even remember. Johnny, I don't like this. I don't like the way you're going on. I think you'd better stop."

"Wait a minute. We're not going to fight about this. Don't be afraid. We'll let that go, your having been to Loring overnight before." Despair suddenly sprang into his voice. "Oh, my God, Cathy, I wish I could hate you. How could you do such a thing? How could you keep me waiting, hours, and you somewhere in Loring? You weren't at this girl's house! I went to Loring after your sister told me where you were and looked up her address in the telephone book and waited for you to come out from nine o'clock till twelve. And you didn't come. You weren't there. Where were you? Where were you?"

Her eyes met his calmly. She sat very erect.

"I'll tell you just once more that I was at Amelia's. I must have left just before you came. And now let me tell you this, Johnny. You must never do such a thing again. You must never talk to me like this again——"

She stopped, struck into a sort of fascination by his face. It was old with an almost humble despair, haggard with a curious, groping torture. A thought of his father came to her suddenly. For an instant it wrung her heart. She said quickly, imploringly:

"Johnny, what's the good of this? We've got so little time together and you spoil half of it with this eternal questioning and quarrelling. What's the difference if I was in Loring? I'm here with you now. And I love you, Johnny, I love you."

He was staring at her queerly. He appeared not to have heard her. His voice was almost calm as he said:

"All those other times you were in Loring, was it when you made excuses about your mother or sister?"

"Oh, I don't know. No, of course not. Johnny, let's drop this."

"Were you going to lie to me this time, too? If I hadn't met your sister, would you have lied to me?"

She didn't answer, looking at him steadily. He caught her by the wrist, pulling her to her feet, his face suddenly suffused.

"You'd have lied to me! You've lied to me before!"

"You're hurting my hand."

"You've lied to me. All those other times you didn't come, you lied to me afterward. Where were you? Where were you Saturday and Sunday?"

"Let me go, Johnny."

"You're going to tell me first!"

She bit her lip, then said levelly: "Anything that concerns me alone, I've got the right to lie about, or tell the truth about, or be silent about, as I please."

"Oh." He dropped her hand. She had said such things before, to justify deceiving her mother and other people. He had let it pass, even though there had been a menace in it for him, even then. And now she had said it to him and stood before him, appallingly self-possessed, despite her pity for him, despite her regret that the evening was spoiled. . . . He managed to mumble:

"If I lied to you——"

"Only don't lie about loving me. When I don't love you any longer, I'll tell you. That's your business, too."

The universe had veered from its course. It was teetering in a grey unreality. He caught at her arms as if for support and scarcely knowing what he said, cried:

"Cathy, you can't throw me over! You can't!"

"I don't want to, Johnny. I love you." She strained her body toward him for his embrace. He held her away.

"How can you deceive me if you love me?"

"I don't deceive you."

"You must tell me everything! You must tell me the truth about everything!"

"Johnny, it's too much! It's like prison, what you're trying to do to me. I can't stand it. You've got to leave me alone. You've got to leave me alone!"

"To do anything you want to do the minute you're out of my sight!"

"Why not? I do nothing wrong!"

"Cathy, stop it! Stop taking that God Almighty tone with me. I've stood it for two years and I can't stand it any longer. It's driven me crazy—yes, ever since the night you threw yourself at me and I might have been any bum laughing at you afterward and making a good story out of you for the fellows——"

"Johnny, be careful!"

"Yes, that would be wrong! Lying down with a fellow, that isn't wrong! Only if he snickers about it afterward and gives your name and particulars at some stag—that would be wrong! My God, I don't know what to make of you. If you love me, it's all right your having gone with me as you did. But the way you talk, nothing is wrong, nothing in the world is wrong so long as you want to do it and nobody talks about it!"

"Johnny, you're going to be sorry. You're going to be terribly sorry if you don't stop."

"No! You're the one who'll be sorry! You can't get away with it. You can't! Just by standing off frozen when something is said to you. Where were

you? Oh, my God, Cathy, tell me the truth and I swear I'll forgive you. Only tell me the truth. Tell me who it was and I'll kill him. Tell me where you went and I'll burn the place. And I'll forgive you, Cathy, I swear I'll forgive you!"

"Johnny! You're out of your mind!"

"Who wouldn't be, thinking the things I've been thinking two days and two nights!" His voice was a hoarse shout. "Who wouldn't be! Who——"

"I swear I've done nothing wrong."

"But nothing you'd do would be wrong! That's what's so horrible about it. There's no end to the awful things that come to my mind about you. Seeing you with everybody, with anybody, flirting with them, hearing them laugh about you afterward."

"Let me go this minute!"

"Yes, that's wrong. I knew that would be wrong. Nobody, even I, can say a word to you. That's wrong. But they do. Cathy, I tell you, they do talk! They laugh at you and give details. They give details, I tell you!"

She was not struggling in his grasp. She was standing perfectly still. He was suddenly aware that she was very angry. And through his intoxication of rage and grief and frustration, marvel came to him at an anger that was so still and so apportioned—a dignity to meet indignity, a hardening to meet invasion, a pitilessness to meet appeal. Before it he was a child stemming the tide, forbidding the

march of the seasons, altering the stars in their course. And before it, for a fleeting moment, he was a poet torn with worship of a mystery he could not fathom and a grandeur that made him bleed.

He wanted to seize her in his arms and possess her rapaciously; he wanted to grovel before her; he wanted to die and lay his futility, brought to flower in death, at her feet. And he wanted to hit her, to hurt her terribly, to prove that she was his and he could do anything with her. She was the magic of all strange things; she was the splendid chaos of his heart and the mysterious content of his soul; she was the rich, proud soil in which he had struck his roots; she was the slow ecstasy of reverence and the piercing delight of irreverence. And she was, too, a small, dark girl whose body no man but he must love. She was saying again: "Let me go." And he didn't even know if he had been the first. He didn't know how many others had loved her. She stood there cold, still, as if she didn't belong to him, as if she belonged to herself, as if she belonged to everybody. . . . A black cloud enveloped him, blotting out all but her faithlessness and her terrible self-possession.

"Tell me where you were! Tell me where you were!" He hardly knew if he were shouting or if the clamour in his ears were the beating of his heart. He felt a raw pain inside him. It was as if something were scraping the depths of him, digging up

fears and doubts and shames that had been buried and forgotten. "You can't tell me. You're not afraid. You're just careful! Nothing's wrong. Everything's clean and right as long as nothing is said about it. As long as nothing is found out. You think you stop people from talking. You don't. I tell you, you don't! God, I talked about you. Nobody could love you the way I do and I talked about you. I told Tim Risely about you and I guess you'd think something was wrong if you could have seen his face and heard what he said. You can't get away with it, you can't. People'll talk about you, and even if they don't, it's wrong, it's wrong." She was struggling now to get free of him, her face very white, her eyes very dark. He only held her more tightly and shook her a little.

"Do you hear? Do you think if I talked about you, any other fellow wouldn't? Oh, my God, you don't know what I've been through sometimes thinking of the way I talked about you, so how can it be when I imagine other fellows doing it. Cathy, don't look at me like that! Don't look at me like that! I can't bear it. It's killing me the way you act. How can you be with me and make love and then stand off as if nothing's happened. You doing all the things you want to do? How do I know what you're doing? I know. By God, I know. You're double-crossing me. You're living with other fellows, too. And I wasn't the first to love you."

Somehow she had wrenched herself loose. Somehow her voice reached him.

"Don't ever speak another word to me as long as you live!"

He must have attempted to seize her again, for she cried out:

"Don't touch me. Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me!"

It wasn't her words that held him rooted to the ground. It was her face. He suddenly saw it, as if she had been gone and had just appeared before him. He saw in it clearly, blindingly, all he had done. He wanted to cry out her name, but he couldn't open his mouth. And then she was gone.

XIII

Cathy, I've been through hell this week, so don't ever punish me like this again no matter what happens.

This was what he would tell her. No complaints. No recriminations. Nothing violent.

But nothing would ever happen again. He would never say a word to her about what she did away from him. He would never ask her again what she had done that Saturday night and Sunday in Loring. She might do it again . . . she might be doing it now——Perhaps the best thing to do would be to kill her and then himself. No. He would dig a little grave inside himself and there bury all his suspicions and all his fears. Let them fester in him, let them eat him away. It would be better than what was happening to him this dark week; better than not being sure whether he would ever see her again. . . .

But she was just punishing him. She had sent back unopened the two letters he had written her, just to punish him. She never appeared in the streets, in the stores she patronized, at the library where she used to go at least twice a week, just to

punish him. She didn't mean really to separate herself from him. She couldn't be so cruel.

But she was cruel. She was monstrously cruel. To let another week go by! . . . But he would be even crueller when she came back. He would make her tell him where she had been that Saturday night and Sunday and all the other times she had lied to him. He would make her account for every minute she spent away from him. He would lay profane and shattering hands on that disdainful privacy of hers. He would never cease paying her off for what she was doing to him. . . .

For what she had done to him from the very start! Throwing herself at him. . . . No! She had loved him. It was all right, even beautiful, if she had loved him. It was what he had told Tim. But that had been her fault. If she had not been so damn' *careful* afterwards . . . cutting him, denying him, reminding him of his stinking blood more cruelly than if she had shouted aloud . . . and talking, smiling softly, to a red-headed boy whose father was a lawyer and a man, and whose mother's neck was always clean! Careful, always careful about little things, about things that didn't count. Two years. Anything in the woods . . . everything. And in the hotel, like any common slut. . . . God! With her head held high, not as his was high, but effortlessly, undeliberately . . . and her black eyes steady . . . steady as if she had nothing to do with things that

lived and died, that sinned and expiated, that needed God . . . as he needed her. *Cathy, don't leave me, I need you. Cathy, don't forsake me, I need you.*

Long, long evenings, brutally sweet, brutally lovely. They pierced him, lonely minute by lonely minute, and lingered in his wounds. If only it weren't summer. He would hate a summer night as long as he lived. He would hate its grave radiance and its invincible calm as long as he lived.

XIV

He stopped her sister on the street one day and she mentioned Cathy, almost at once. She had to hurry home. Her sister Catherine was making a dress for her and she had to be fitted. She looked at him sidewise and worried her full lips with her teeth. *Sophy is romantic. She'd probably be thrilled.* He might say to her: "Sophy, I'm in love with your sister and she's in love with me, only she's angry with me for something I did, and won't see me. Tell her I'm sorry. Tell her I'm sick waiting for her. Tell her my worst punishment is thinking what I did to her. Help me now and I'll do anything in the world for you any time you need it."

He gazed mutely after her as she walked away with her conscious step that constrained the swing of her hips. *She'd never let a boy kiss her, not even if she was crazy about him.* If Cathy were like that. Oh, God, if Cathy were like that.

He met her again a couple of days later. She was returning home from an evening spent at Mary Wolven's, and he walked with her as far as her street. She chattered in self-conscious spurts and

the colour came and went in her pinky-white cheeks. *She* didn't care what the townspeople would say. She met the glances of passers-by nervously, even guiltily, but her mouth was set in a rebellious pout. When she said good night to him at the corner of her street she looked excitedly pleased with herself and a little frightened.

She said nothing of Cathy.

Nearly three weeks had passed and all he knew of her was that she had been making a dress for her sister.

It was the lunch hour. Sophy sat at the soda fountain and regarded impersonally the sandwich that had just been set before her.

"I'm losing my appetite," she remarked with pleasant alarm.

Grace, who sat beside her, didn't look up from her salad and said idly:

"You must be in love. First time I ever knew you to lose your appetite."

"That's how much you know about me," said Sophy seriously. "Sometimes I don't feel like eating for days on end. Mother worries herself simply sick about me."

"Mother would. But I wouldn't. I wouldn't worry about anyone that can go through a box of candy the way you can, even if you can't eat much supper afterward."

"You're a fine one to talk. You ate as much of that candy as I did that day at your house."

"I ate as much of it as you didn't, you mean. And that wasn't much."

"Oh, really!" Sophy shrugged and bit into her sandwich. She ate slowly, dreamily.

"But I'm not in love, Grace," she said after a moment.

"Who said you were?"

Sophy flushed. "You just said I was. I'm not." She gave a self-conscious laugh. "*I'm* not."

"Well, I'm not either," said Grace. "I thought I was with that Mr. Mitchell, but I guess it was just infatuation." She became gloomily retrospective. "He was the handsomest thing and the best dresser! It nearly broke my heart. He had the worst bow legs I've ever seen. That day I went to the beach with him, I nearly died of shame."

Sophy listened impatiently. She didn't care just now whether or not Grace were in love or with whom. There were more important things happening. She said:

"Yes, he was a good dresser, but I don't think he was so terribly handsome." Grace started to protest, but Sophie's voice rose above hers. "Do you remember that Johnny Bogan, Grace? You met him that week-end you stayed at my house. You know, the shoemaker's son."

Grace's eyes flickered and she said with a slightly

bored air: "Yes. That squarehead. What about him?"

"He's not a squarehead," said Sophy irritatedly. "You talk about your Mr. Mitchell being handsome! Why, Johnny could draw circles and circles around him for looks. Why, his eyes alone! And I bet you anything in the world, he hasn't got bow legs."

Grace lifted her eyebrows. "What are you getting so fussed about? I didn't say you were a squarehead." She leaned back a little and looked studiously at her friend. "Sophy Willis, have you got a mash on that squarehead?"

"Grace Horner, will you please stop calling a perfectly harmless boy a squarehead!"

Grace nodded knowingly and gave an amused little laugh. "So you are in love! And with—all right, then I won't call him a squarehead. But how did it happen? Did you go out with him? I thought you said your mother would raise the——"

"Oh, nothing! I didn't say I was in love with him. I said I wasn't in love with him." The tears were ready, back of her eyes. She felt furious with Grace. "He's in love with me," she ended defiantly.

"Oh. Check, you over there, and make it snappy, if you *don't* mind. Are you through, Sophy? We can take a little walk before we go back."

She said good-humouredly as they walked out: "So he's in love with you."

"Yes." It was hard, or rather discouraging, to tell things to Grace. Nice things. You felt all the while you were telling her something that she didn't think it was the least bit wonderful, and after you got through talking, you had a feeling yourself that it wasn't wonderful at all.

But this had to be told. This had to be told to someone.

"He follows me whenever he sees me and waits for me to pass by every morning and every night and—and the way he looks at me and—and everything. And he's always hanging around my street and passing my house, and once, very late, I looked out and saw him standing across the street looking up. He stood there the longest time——"

Her face grew brighter as she talked. Her secret grew brighter, more glamorous. For once, Grace's light and tolerant attention had no effect. Let Grace think what she liked, this was the most romantic thing that had ever happened. Mr. Mitchell indeed! Sophy's heart swelled with triumph. Why, Johnny was like a hero out of a book, with his good looks and the tragedy in his life and now his love for her, hopeless because of that tragedy. Oh, it was a shame that his mother and father had been such terrible people and that his father had killed his mother. He was the nicest boy. There wasn't a better-looking boy in Duffield, or in Loring either, for that matter.

"And I'm sure," she mourned in conclusion, "that he'd be the most wonderful dancer if he only had a chance to dance."

Grace disagreed. "He looks clumsy to me. Mark my word, that boy looks clumsy to me."

Sophy held her peace serenely. She remembered suddenly why Grace found fault with him. He hadn't fallen for her and Grace never forgave a boy who didn't fall for her when he had the chance. Sophy had noticed that the boys and men who fell in love with Grace were all perfect—unless they had something very obvious the matter with them, like bow legs; while those who didn't notice her, were undesirable for any number of reasons.

She said no more to Grace, who was nothing loth to turn the talk on her own affairs. Sophy scarcely listened to her. Her eyes luminous and fixed, she went on reviewing in her mind all the evidences of Johnny Bogan's hopeless passion for her. The way he looked at her, as though he wanted to beg something of her . . . the way he got red in the face when he met her, and excited-looking, and then pale and unhappy and sort of desperate when he had to leave her. She remembered exactly how he acted and looked, although she didn't seem to be noticing things when they were together. That was partly because she was so flustered thinking somebody might tell Adelaide. Oh, but it was a shame. It was a shame they couldn't walk freely right through the

gate and sit on the porch in the moonlight. It would be just as romantic. . . . It would be more romantic, in a way.

He might become a great engineer in a big city and then come back and claim her. "I have waited and worked all these years—for you," he would say, and everybody would be impressed and enthusiastic, even Adelaide and Cathy. And they would be married and live in a beautiful house and have servants and thick carpets and a pure white enamel sink and washtub in the kitchen and the best victrola that could be bought and always the newest dance records. And babies, three, two darling little blondes and one dark, not so dark as Cathy, and prettier than Cathy. And Grace would simply die of envy about everything. And he would come home from work every evening and she would have a delicious supper ready for him with embroidered napkins and a new kind of pie practically every day, and he would put his arm around her and whisper:

"My darling little wife." He would kiss her . . . he would hold her tightly. . . . Her mind paused, she was tingling and confused, her heart was beating quickly. . . .

"What are you so red about?" asked Grace. "You haven't been listening to me at all."

"Oh, yes, yes I have. You said to him: 'But I don't care for chop suey to-night'."

"Why, I said that ages ago. Talk about back-

ward people! Well! And then when I said that, he said——"

Grace, a little indignantly, repeated the details Sophy had missed and then continued her story.

Now why couldn't they just sit on the porch. Goodness, it wouldn't hurt anybody if they just sat on the porch! Or in the hammock in the back garden, with the moon overhead, and no more than accidentally touch each other sometimes. Why, people would pity him, they should pity him, if they knew how he loved her and she couldn't even walk up the street with him without fearing that Adelaide might raise the dickens about it. Maybe if she told Cathy. . . . Cathy might fix it with Adelaide. Cathy had no objection to him. It was only on account of Adelaide and people talking. Well, she couldn't do anything right now, anyway. Cathy was away. She had left all at once, the day before, for a month's visit to Aunt Laura up at the Lakes.

The day Cathy had decided to leave Duffield for the rest of the summer was the day Johnny had at last seen her. It was on Birch Street, at noon. She couldn't pass him by unless she darted swiftly around him, into the gutter. He said disjointedly:

"Cathy, please. . . . In the woods to-night. . . . For God's sake, Cathy, don't . . . Haven't slept . . . been sick . . . just one word, Cathy, for God's sake, you can't do this. . . ."

She said softly: "Let me pass." And after a moment even more softly: "Murderer's son. Shoemaker's son."

She went by. He didn't look after her. He stood perfectly still, physically shocked.

XV

He remembered long afterward that his first clear thought, hours later, had been to get away at once, to leave Duffield behind him forever. Underneath the thought was a terrified and unrecognized urge to recapture his life, to rescue it from the strange, unbidden currents that were carrying it almost casually, yet so surely, away from his plan. If he had gone at once. . . . If he hadn't met Sophy the following evening. . . . If she hadn't stopped him, shyly. . . . And if she had not told him in the course of her chatter:

"My sister Catherine has gone away. She went to visit up at the Lakes. I'll miss her. The house seems so empty without her."

The house? The town, the world!

When Sophy left him, he walked out beyond West Duffield to the woods. He lay in the clearing, face to the earth, with the dry, shocked eyes of profound defeat . . . and presently with the wet, desolate eyes of a boy, not twenty-two, who hears in the rustle of the leaves, the murmer of the brook, a beloved voice whispering: "Murderer's son. Shoemaker's son."

Late that night Sophy, peeping from behind the window-blind, saw him pass by. He didn't look up. But after walking to the end of the block, he turned back and then he looked up. The street lamp across the way threw a shaft of light across his face. Sophy's heart swelled and the tears came luxuriously to her eyes. He looked so forlorn, so unhappy. She would have liked to call to him, to give him some comfort. She felt at once exquisitely sorry for him, slightly martyred herself, and vaguely indignant with everybody else. He went away. She got into bed and lay awake weaving fancies. One of them was so delicious, she had to tell part of it to Grace the next day, saying that it had been a dream.

They had their second soda together. It was at her timid suggestion. Afterward they started to walk aimlessly and found themselves on the Calamy road, a back road winding around the hills and leading to Loring. They came to a smooth, level stretch.

"This is where I've been learning to drive. I guess I'll forget everything I've learned by the time Cathy gets back. I'm kind of slow about it, I don't know why. I get so nervous. Cathy learned in no time. She's quick about such things. Mother says she's like a man."

And again—

"We got a letter from Cathy to-day. Sometimes I wish I'd been a school teacher too. It's so nice

having the whole summer free. But I don't know. School teachers are so—not that they're old maids or anything, but—well, nothing ever seems to happen to school teachers. For instance, all my teachers at school——"

She chattered on. But the rest wasn't about Cathy and mattered nothing to him. He was silent, answering only when he had to and wondering if the dress she had on was the one Cathy had made for her. He put out his hand as though to touch it, noticed, without considering why, that she drew away, and he let it go.

More, more about Cathy! Facts, common realities. Cathy sewing. Cathy writing a letter, Cathy driving, Cathy sewing, Cathy writing. . . . Pictures unreeling themselves in his mind over and over again like a continuous film. They must leave no room for fancy; they must crowd out imagination, that searching her out in strange and random arms . . . profaning her . . . sacking him till he was empty of her and himself and everything else but empty blasphemings.

They met frequently after that, at first as a sort of hoped-for accident, later by wholly tacit agreement. He walked up to the corner of Birch and High Streets and lingered until she came tripping toward him with her stiff, self-conscious walk so unlike Cathy's. Ah, if it were Cathy coming toward him like that, freely, openly, Cathy with her light and

leisured step that took the ground as if she gravely disdained it.

Mostly they walked on unfrequented streets and roads. He gleaned meagre enough news of Cathy from her, and the intervals exasperated him, filled as they were with her meaningless chatter and silly giggling, or with silences, bitter or dull on his part, uneasy and fluttering on hers. But her nearness to Cathy was the only assuagement he knew for his loss; and her companionship all he had for his loneliness. Bitter assuagement. A hand pressing hard to make a grinding ache a dull one.

He reflected grimly sometimes on what Cathy would say if she knew he was out walking with her sister, like any town boy with his girl. That might scare her. That might bring a little fear into her eyes. People talking about her precious sister. . . . His heart leaped suddenly. She might come to him and beg him to leave her sister alone. Then he could—— No, she wouldn't be begging anything of him. Of anyone. She would more likely sit down hard on her sister and the next time Sophy ran into him, she would pass by with averted eyes. That's what would happen. He cast a sour look at Sophy walking beside him, full-blown, milky in the darkness. Her arms were bare. He touched the one near him suddenly, pressed it spasmodically. She drew it away, her eyes raised to his in frightened appeal. Then, timorously, she slipped her hand into

his. After a while he dropped it, to pick up a small stone and shy it after a rabbit that had scurried across their path.

After that, she always gave him her hand when it got dark. It was a large hand, soft and boneless. Try as he might, he couldn't pretend that it was Cathy's spare and thin-skinned little paw he was holding.

When they sat down to rest on a rock by the roadside, she let him put his arm about her waist. But she wouldn't let him kiss her. Usually he didn't want to very much, but he thought irritatedly:

"What does she want me to do, sit and hold her as if she were a bale of goods?"

He wanted to push her away, especially when she wriggled closer to him, burying her face in his shoulder and whispering breathlessly:

"No, Johnny, no. You mustn't. Let's just sit like this. It's so nice like this."

The fool, trembling all over! "Oh, Cathy, still and fiery creature! Why didn't you tremble a little! Why didn't you tremble a little!"

One night they went to the movies. Their elbows rested together on the single arm between their seats. Once their knees touched . . . pressed hard against each other, until she moved away, her delicious languor whipped into a little panic of swift blood and pounding heart. He took her hand, interlaced his fingers with hers.

Going out of the theatre, her excitement underlay her giggle, her reckless satisfaction in feeling people were looking at them, perhaps criticising, disapproving, but none the less aware that Johnny and she made a handsome couple, and that their being together was the saddest, most thrilling and most romantic thing that had ever happened in Duffield. If only Adelaide didn't hear about it. Well, what if Adelaide did hear about it!

They went, not to Rorke's, but to a little candy shop opposite Petter's garage, for a soda. Sitting opposite her, he regarded her brightness moodily. Her cheeks were flushed, her reddish-blonde hair gleamed alive under the electric light, the skin on her arms and throat had a velvety thickness, the sort of skin to cover firm and opulent curves. Her eyes drooped under his stare. He thought suddenly and passionately: "I'd give everything in the world, all the kisses, all the women, for one word from Cathy . . . for one kiss, just one kiss." Six weeks now since Cathy had left him. How could he stand six more, and six more, and six more. . . .

Outside, she paused and looked up at the stars.

"Mmmm." She breathed deeply. "It's the most wonderful night I've ever seen."

"Do you have to go home?"

"Oh, yes. Mother's probably asleep, but I have to go home anyway."

"Listen, Sophy——" He looked down the road,

toward the river. "Did you ever see the river at night? We could walk it in fifteen minutes——"

"Oh, I couldn't, Johnny. I couldn't."

"Come on, Sophy. It won't be an hour all in all. We'll just take a look at it."

"It's so late."

"Come on, Sophy."

"But it's so late."

He had taken her arm and was pulling her along gently. Hesitatingly, she allowed herself to be led.

"I'll get killed if mother wakes up and doesn't find me home."

After a few moments, he let go her arm and walked freely with long, quick strides. She hurried along breathlessly on the dark road, close to him, yet not quite side by side.

XVI

It is perhaps not altogether fear nor the tradition of virtue that strengthens feminine resistence. To feminine senses, particularly be they untried, it is given to find, in assault and struggle, in titillation and denial, an experience complete in itself.

Johnny had thought of nothing but to take his few kisses easily. But the yes-yes-no! response, exceedingly impetuous if quite uncalculated, soon told on him. Inflamed, he saw these moments only as a forerunner to fulfilment. Checked, he was unhappy, dissatisfied and at a loss.

Sophy, on the other hand, enjoyed herself safely but thoroughly, perils, tears, indignations and all.

He had finally forced her to his will. Moments had followed, moments of weeping, weeping and panting, as for her life. Johnny then rose. Sophy sat up and, putting her face in her hands, gave herself completely to tears. Now and then she spluttered through her sobs:

"Oh, Johnny, how could you? What did you take me for? What can you take me for?"

Johnny stood, morose and silent, before the solemn

spectacle. . . . What did he want her for? It was Cathy he needed, Cathy he wanted. *Oh, Cathy, Cathy!* The way she had gone to him. The way a brook runs into a river. Beautiful! Afraid of nothing. . . . Ah, no, *ashamed* of nothing! *Who else was there, is there, that you go to the way you went to me, the way a brook runs into a river? You wouldn't sit and howl because a fellow wanted to really love you. You'd break his heart with a look and walk away. . . . No! Not if you wanted him as your sister wants me. She wants me all right. But she doesn't think nothing's wrong, so long as she wants it. She's got self-respect. She's pure. . . . Oh, God, Cathy! . . .*

Sophy got up, her sobs dwindling into sniffles, her eyes resistless and pleading on his face.

"Johnny——" she faltered.

"I—I'm sorry——"

"Oh, Johnny!" Her voice broke, her tears gushed forth again and she fell into his arms. He held her limply and uneasily, as if she were a bale of goods that might in a moment come inexplicably alive. She clung to him, richly, tearfully content.

He was going to keep his hands from her. Away from her he had no desire for her; he felt little else but the torments of his loss. It was this that drove him to the corner of Birch and High Streets—in search of her, in search of any tangible reminder of

her, in search of some miracle that would bring him solace. And it was there that Sophy came tripping toward him, the very next night after the scene by the river.

She was shy and radiant and tremulous, and in the darkness of the Calamy road gave him her lips to kiss, her eyes closed, her face still and devoted as though she were receiving a sacrament. He embraced her uneasily. She whispered:

"You're the only boy I've ever let kiss me, Johnny." And added tensely: "Lots of boys have wanted to."

"Have they?"

"Yes. But I never let them. I—I've been saving myself for you."

He was for some reason irritated—perhaps by the hint of something like melodrama in her tone. He made no reply. She sighed deeply.

"I wish—I wish—oh, dear, I guess there's no use wishing. . . ." She put her head on his shoulder.

After a while, he realized he was becoming aroused again. He thought: "I ought to let her go." But he continued to caress and kiss her, holding himself well in hand. She abandoned herself trustfully to his careful love-making, until it got less careful, and then she sprang up, trembling and faltering that she had to go home.

Now she met him, if only for a few minutes, every evening. Their love-making became a ritual of self-

exasperation. Johnny thought of going to Loring, didn't go; thought of taking her by force, tried it again and was left floundering as before under her tears and reproaches. The situation told, even upon her. Once she burst into hysterical tears. Johnny, watching her stolidly, guessed why.

"What's the matter, Sophy?"

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny!"

He was silent for a moment. Then, in a dry whisper:

"Why don't you, Sophy? It'll be all right. No one'll know."

"No one'll know what?"

Oh, God, what a fool. As if she didn't know what!

"About us," he said roughly, "sleeping together."

Her shock was so genuine, so pitiful, that it disarmed him completely. He apologized, soothed her, even felt a little sorry and a little tender. You couldn't talk like that to an innocent girl. He became aware sensually of her innocence. That large, soft body had been loved by no man before him. It would be pleasant to possess her. . . . He saw Cathy's grave eyes. *I forbid you.* His heart missed a beat almost as if he had heard her voice in his ears rather than in his heart. *But will you come back to me if I don't? Will you come back to me if I leave her alone?*

How could he fancy her grave eyes wavering!

Had they ever wavered before his? Had they ever wavered in fear or in anger, in pity or in passion? *Murderer's son. Shoemaker's son.* Even that she had said in soft tones, her eyes steady and oblivious to him. If she had said it with hate, with horror, even with bitter scorn—— It would be something to get hold of, something to cope with—human mettle. Powerless he had been from the beginning, fretting his strength out on something of no substance, and strong as no substance could be. To conquer it, to conquer it, whether in love or in hate, it didn't matter; to know himself potent, if only for a moment, to affirm his manhood not in passion, but in a power for which passion was only a plea—the power to be, and to be eternal and dominant.

He bent and kissed Sophy. And in his heart, the kiss was a hard blow struck at Cathy.

She didn't meet him the next evening, and the evening following told him hurriedly that she had only a few minutes.

"Cathy's home."

How does she look? What does she say? He held back the questions that sprang to his tongue, and said instead: "Does that mean you won't be meeting me again?"

"No, oh, no. . . .Johnny, I'm going to tell Cathy. She'll help us. She'll talk to Adelaide——"

"Don't be a fool! For God's sake, Sophy, don't

start crying. I didn't mean it. But it's no good telling her. And what'll you tell her anyway?"

"I'll tell her—we care. . . . So you can come to the house and——"

"And she'll see to it that you'll never see me again. I know."

"Oh, no. You don't know Cathy. She's not like other people about—about you. It's only she doesn't want the neighbours to talk. But she'll understand now. And she's got a lot of influence with Adelaide. Adelaide's the one. She believes everything anybody says. Poor darling, she's been worrying about my being out so much evenings and —and—— Oh, we've got to do something. Cathy'll help us, you'll see. She'll help us."

Yes, let her know, he thought. At the worst, he would lose Sophy, who got on his nerves anyway. And then something might come of it, something might happen. She might be moved to see him, to talk to him. If he could only see her alone. If he could only make her listen to him. Hope trembled in him. His fancy sketched swift pictures desperately, out-running conviction. He said slowly:

"Tell her. All right, tell her."

Sophy looked up at him, eyes liquid. She gave a happy, nervous little laugh.

"Everything'll be all right, Johnny. It's got to be. You'll see."

XVII

He saw Cathy the next day. She passed by in the little blue car. She was brown from long hours in the sun—brown and keen and quick as a lash. He stood motionless, looking after her, something within him whimpering a little, something else exulting. Oh, the proud economy of her face! No frills of tint, no furbelows of curve, no apparent pulse of expression. Yet instinct she was with ultimate beauty as though nature were saying:

"Look, in this girl I have shown the greatest power which is mine and mine alone—to be grand without grandeur, imperial without pomp, and animate though still!"

Had Sophy told her yet? There was no knowing, no knowing.

The day passed in a sick, inward excitement. He waited a long time at the corner for Sophy that evening, but she did not appear. There was no one in sight on the porch of the Willis house. He watched for her on the bus the next morning, wondering that she was not there. Three more days passed without a glimpse of her. She must have told

Cathy. And Cathy, as simply as she herself had done it, had caused Sophy to drop out of his life.

God, was it going to end as easily as that for Cathy? Was he nothing to her, not even a factor to be reckoned with in regard to her sister's safety? Nothing. Nothing. . . .

He walked up and down in the little front room of his house. It was late, near midnight. He had eaten no supper. He had tramped all evening, through the town, along the river's edge, up and down past the Willis house, hoping to see one—or the other. Oh, that great, cowardly fool of a Sophy! All that had been needed apparently, was a look, a word from Cathy. All the trembling she had done in his arms, all the melting looks she had given him, all the languishing and weeping! He ground his teeth. What a fool he had been. If only he had loved her as he wanted to. That would be something Cathy could not have dismissed with a word or a look. Oh, no, Cathy, not even you could dismiss that just by sticking your nose in the air and looking final. That's something I bet would have brought you to me, if only to tell me what you thought of me, if only to make me feel small and rotten and not good enough to touch your sister's shoes, much less yours. . . . Oh, God, Cathy, why don't you come to me, why don't you come to me and kill me and have done with it!

He sat down, suddenly aware how very tired he

was. He thought: "If I could only stop thinking, if I could only sleep." He was twenty-two. In ten years he would be thirty-two, in ten more, forty-two, in ten more, fifty-two—— He might live to be sixty, seventy—God only knew how long he might live. All those years without Cathy. Minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day without Cathy. He thought with panic: "And maybe there's no death. Maybe there's such a thing as eternal life after this life." An eternity wanting Cathy. "That beats the hell the preachers talk about," he said aloud simply. But he would do all he could to avoid that. He would be cremated when he died, and then have his ashes burned over and over again, until not a vestige of him remained. He would cheat her. . . .

Funny he had never had a thought of immortality before he met Cathy. Just hadn't thought of it, wouldn't have believed if he had. But knowing her . . . it seemed somehow impossible that life was only a short affair of eating and sleeping and loving, wiped out in death. There was some deep secret about her. . . . She was an assertion of purpose, a pledge of continuity. . . .

Oh, God, what a dirty trick. What a dirty, rotten trick! To give him a glory like that, a belief in permanency and then to leave him trapped in that belief, afraid to look toward death for surcease.

He groaned. *My God, my Cathy, why hast thou*

forsaken me. . . . What did Jesus know of anguish! Nailed to the cross, nails through His hands, nails through His feet, thorns piercing, pressing into His brow. Torn and bleeding flesh, flesh and bone afire and tumultuous with pain—that would be a relief, that would be a relief! That would make him forget, engulf memories, stifle the craving, the intolerable craving to see her, to touch her, only to see her, to touch her.

For a moment he was caught, poised in his desire as if impaled. The ache in his heart was so palpable, so thick, that through it he could not feel his heart beats. "My heart's stopped beating," he thought crazily. Life was tangled in a pause. Death was such a conviction, so inevitably imminent, that the instinct for self-preservation sprang blindly forth—terror before ultimate peril. He gripped fast the edge of the table, he laboured deliberately to breathe, his senses groped for his heart beats. The moment passed, sequence was restored to him. He put his head on the table and wept exhaustedly.

He wasn't surprised at the knock on the door. It was almost as if he had been expecting it. He had suffered the worst. There was nothing worse for him, so God was calling it quits and bringing her back to him. *Oh, Cathy, I'll be good now, I'll be noble, I'll make up for everything, for every——*

His face wet with tears, he had flung open the door. He saw it was Sophy, he knew it was Sophy,

yet his mind ran weakly on, his thought drearily finished its course—"ugly thought I ever had about you, about your sister, about everybody, about myself."

Sophy closed the door behind her. She clasped her hands tightly, looked up at him with bright, frightened eyes. She breathed:

"Oh, Johnny."

He said dully: "Well?" hating her as one who had cheated his last hope.

"Oh, Johnny, did you think I'd forgotten you? Did you think I'd given you up? Are you angry? Please don't be angry. See, I'm here. I won't leave you——"

"I'm not angry. What happened?"

Her face quivered, she threw her arms about his neck and burst into tears.

"I can't stand it any more. I can't. Johnny, I'll —I'll marry you!"

He stared down at her thick, reddish-blonde hair. He led her to a chair, and then sat down opposite her.

"I'm tired," he said. "I've got to sit."

"Poor darling. Poor, poor darling." She made as if to go toward him; he restrained her with an involuntary gesture. "If you knew what I've been through too! I thought I'd die. I thought I'd kill myself. I——"

He interrupted her, hard and patient. "Stop cry-

ing, will you, Sophy, and tell me what happened. What did Cathy say?"

"I don't believe it! I don't believe it! Oh, Johnny, she said the most awful things about you. She said you were no good——" Her eyes clouded, dilated in remembered horror.

"What did she say?" Ah, he was tired.

"She said you'd run wild with bad women—in Loring—since you were fifteen."

Who should know better than she, from whom he had held back nothing?

"She's a liar," he said mechanically.

"She said you—you probably were sick—the way men get sick from going with bad women." Her voice was choked with awe, with painful embarrassment, but her eyes, for a moment, were naïve. "I didn't even know Cathy knew about such things. She's so—serious—and she never seems to think about anything. It was Grace told me. . . . Oh, I know it isn't true. I know Cathy said those things just to get me to leave you!"

"She's a liar. What else did she say?"

Her eyes brimmed over again. "She said you just meant to—ruin me, she said you'd made up to all the other girls too—Johnny, that isn't true!"

"No."

"I knew it. I knew it wasn't true. I told her you loved me, and only me. You do, Johnny, don't you?"

He looked at her steadily, unseeingly, and said:

"She's a liar."

"No, it's only she's like Adelaide. She believes what people say. Oh, I don't care what they say. Let them say what they like. We'll get married, Johnny, and be happy. I'll stand by you. I won't leave you."

She ran to him, caught his hands. Her full throaty voice seemed to fill the room, made a strange, soft whir in his ears.

"And Cathy'll stand by us, too. She doesn't—it isn't as if she hates you or anything. She even said she was sorry for you, and she sounded sad when she was saying those things about you. She wasn't angry. Cathy never gets angry. You'd love her, really, if you knew her. And Adelaide, too. Adelaide's such a darling. She's cunning, you know. It's funny, a mother being cute, but she's cute, really. And she'll love you. Cathy'll fix it with her. Cathy can always manage Adelaide."

"She wasn't even angry. She doesn't even hate me." He sounded far away.

"No, of course not. . . . Oh, you mean Cathy. No, of course she doesn't." Her voice was eager. "It's only on account of the neighbours and—and—well, you wait and see. When she sees how we love each other, when we're married, she'll help us. That's the way Cathy is. And we'll all be happy. Adelaide and Cathy, too."

She sank to the floor, put her cheek against his knee, shivered a little. "I couldn't stand it," she whispered. "I was lying in bed and thinking of you and I couldn't stand it another minute. I love you, Johnny."

Her upturned face pleaded for his kiss. He put his lips, cold and stiff, against hers. She stroked his hand, her face very wistful, her voice gentle and uneven with sudden pity.

"Poor Johnny. I'm sorry I—I made you wait so long. I guess I was afraid. But I'm not now. I'll marry you now and I'll make you happy."

Nothing in her voice now but love and pity. A tranquil rise and fall, a cadence sure and true and clean of flourish, as if her heart, for a moment absorbed and unafraid, read beautifully the selfless theme in love.

He didn't understand it, consciously. All he knew was that something impelled him to say:

"Poor Sophy."

"No. Don't feel sorry for me. I'd rather marry you, despite—everything, than anybody else in the world!"

He said after a little silence: "You'd better go now, Sophy. We'll talk about it some more tomorrow."

She rose docilely, humbly. "All right, dear. But you'll have to meet me in Loring, at lunch time. Can you get away?"

"I don't know. Maybe in the evening. Meet you outside your office."

"No. Cathy drives me to work and calls for me. She——" Her face clouded, then cleared defiantly. "Well, she'll just see there's no help for it and then she'll make the best of it. That's the way Cathy is. I know."

"I'll meet you at lunch time," he said.

He took her to the door. "I won't walk home with you because if anyone sees us at this hour, it'll be bad for you. It'll be bad enough if you're seen alone."

"I don't care," she whispered, kissing him. "Everybody'll know anyway, to-morrow."

XVIII

He had grasped at a straw, and found Sophy Willis' life in his hands. He was conscious of that now, of Sophy as a human being, and one in love, in joy, in pain, in fear. "It's a dirty thing to do," he thought stonily, remembering her wistful face, her voice uneven with pity. But in his fancy, he was already striding up the walk of the Willis house, at Sophy's side, Sophy's husband confronting Sophy's sister.

It was ironing day. Miss Scofield, who "helped" for the Willises from ten to six every day but Sunday, was pressing out the last of the laundry heap. Others might, the Willises never would, call their servant by her first name. It was a habit, rather than a principle, imposed upon them by the late Mr. Willis, who was so earnestly democratic a soul, that he took the greatest pains to make the humblest of humankind feel that they were, after all, as good as he. Miss Scofield, who was "Annie" to the rest of the world as well as to herself, had begun to get used to this weighty courtesy only after Mr. Willis' death; now she never gave it a thought, feeling quite

at home with herself in the Willis home despite it.

She was now not only pressing; she was, in her sad, embarrassed way, telling Cathy the tale of how she had lost her teeth.

They had been the first set of false teeth to be seen back of West Duffield where Miss Scofield lived, and she looked back on the prominence they had given her as the chief glory of her life. They had cost her ninety-five dollars, which she had paid in the course of a year. Ninety-five dollars for some dozen teeth! Miss Scofield remembered in her soul the respectful consternation of her neighbours. People came to see her teeth, they handled them, they marvelled at their verisimilitude. They watched her chew her food with them, they studied her smile, they were transfixed by its strange and pristine glitter. She learned secretly to do tricks with them, for the happiness of her sister's children, then small, who lost all sense of injury or frustration in the wonder of seeing teeth rove slowly and *en masse* from side to side, up and down, or, quick as a flash, out of the mouth altogether. On the whole, that had been a bright time for Miss Scofield, carrying in its own small way a conviction of extravagance, distinction and power over notoriously unruly children.

Time wove the brightness into the usual dull fabric of habit. Miss Scofield wore her teeth less and

less. They were not quite comfortable, and she never really got used to them. She usually carried them with her, in her pocket, prepared to don them at need, or perhaps at a request, or perhaps merely at the flicker of a whim. That was how she had lost them—from her pocket.

She had been berrying. There were her teeth one minute, safe in her pocket, and then the next minute they were gone. The berry patch, all the berry patches, were gone through as with a fine comb. To no avail. Searching parties were more or less organized. The countryside was scoured. The teeth were not recovered.

"I often think," said Miss Scofield, as sad, as embarrassed as ever, "that somebody picked 'em up and kept 'em."

That was nigh on to ten years ago. Yet, still, when Miss Scofield found herself in the neighbourhood of the fatal berry patch, she prowled around the grounds, poking among dead leaves, kicking aside stones, probing through berry bushes.

Cathy had heard the story before. In fact, she had a memory of herself as a child, grave and absorbed, watching the crumpled, caved-in line of Miss Scofield's mouth shift sadly, embarrassedly, over the mumbled words in which she told of her glory and her loss. She therefore listened amiably but abstractedly as she folded and sorted the linen and thought of Sophy.

She had been dismayed, and then worried, in the face of Sophy's hysterical defiance. Systematically, she had set about to demolish, not only the connection between Johnny and her, but the feeling that Sophy had for him. There had been appeals to her love for Adelaide. Attacks of all kinds on her vanity. Inculcation of fear. Plain, if gentle bullying. It had seemed successful, at least in so far as Sophy had agreed not to see him again. On that, Cathy had wisely dismissed the whole business, and as wisely taken complete and unquestioning charge of all of Sophy's movements.

Sophy had been peculiar this morning, almost feverish. . . .

Cathy felt a deep displeasure toward Johnny. Sophy would get over it, of course, in no time. But she was miserable enough now. Cathy had no quarrel with suffering. There was in her no emotional or intellectual revolt against the inevitable ills of the race or of the individual, however close to her. So long as there was order, that marvellous rhythm of cause and effect, action and reaction. Whether in pain or in joy. . . . But Sophy's pain arose from a situation that had no legitimate relation to its cause. She probably would never have fallen in love with Johnny, had she not been mistaken about the nature of his attentions. Misconception at the root. It was all wrong.

It was, then, this vague sense of disorder that

oppressed her, rather than direct pity for her sister. Funny, I don't pity people, she thought. Maybe I'm cruel. She was wrong. Cruel, she might be. But pity she had, none the less profound in that it was impersonal, powerless to influence her—perhaps because it sprang from no identification of self with the experience she witnessed. *It might be I.* That potent threat—father of human pity—had no place in Cathy.

At any rate, if Sophy should have a relapse of defiance, she must be made to suffer yet more. She must be told that it was for Cathy, and not for herself, that Johnny had paraded up and down, nights, before the house. She must know that he had made love to her out of revenge. . . . Yes, he probably wants to hurt me through her. Poor Johnny. As if any hurt he dealt her, or anyone, could put him at peace with himself. He's all upset. He's always been all upset.

It never occurred to her that she might be necessary to that adjustment to himself and the world that meant peace. If she had been assured of it, she would have been surprised—and unmoved. She realized he wanted her back—as she herself often wanted him back. For the excitement of his love. For the gaiety of his companionship. For an hour or two. But her desire, whenever it arose, was automatically repressed by the memory of what had happened in the woods, their last meeting, by what

he had told her. Tim. . . . Ugly mind, ugly soul . . . pawing her . . . ghostly witnesses of her intimacies with her lover. For two years. To have been told once was enough for Tim. No subsequent denial from Johnny could keep the ugly mind from prying. . . . Her face grew stern as it always did, and always would, at recollection. She thought of the indignities Johnny had poured on her on his own account, the words he had flung at her. It intensified the finality of their separation. And upon that came a passive regret. He was so nice. Splendid and fierce. Things might have worked out, and we might have married. There's no one quite like him here. Mort. . . . No, nothing like him. Well, it was over, and perhaps better so.

She dismissed her thoughts, arranged dish towels and table linens in the kitchen linen closet, and encouraged Miss Scofield's muted garrulousness with a smile. The telephone rang. She answered it quickly, afraid it would disturb Adelaide's afternoon nap upstairs.

It was Mort Sutter.

"I was just thinking of you."

"Mental telepathy. But if there's anything in that hokum, you should always be thinking of me. Because I'm always thinking of you."

She waited. She had stated a fact. She waited patiently for Mort to have done with squeezing sentiment out of it. She was used to it.

"How about a show to-night?" He came to the point. He was, also, used to her.

"I'd like to, but I can't to-night. You can come over if you like, though, and spend the evening."

"Aw, gee. . . . Could we slip in a little ride?"

"Maybe. You might bring Arthur, because Sophy'll go with us."

"Oh. . . . Well, all right. I'll be over after supper."

Cathy returned to the kitchen. Miss Scofield resumed her sad, embarrassed mumble. Ten minutes later Sophy and Johnny walked into the house.

"I'm happy, happy, Johnny," Sophy had whispered, clinging to his arm, looking into his face with shy, soft ardour.

He didn't reply, looking straight ahead of him, taking long, measured strides toward the Duffield bus.

"I wish—we didn't have to go home right away . . . be by ourselves awhile. . . . We could have a —a wedding luncheon. Just you and I. . . . Oh, Johnny, let's wait a while."

"We'll eat later," said Johnny mechanically.

Sophy sighed, but her eyes on him were adoring. So honourable. So brave. Thus had she seen many a hero in the movies march firmly and boldly to confront his bride's aghast and forbidding parents.

JOHNNY BOGAN

Hurry, hurry, Johnny Bogan, toward the bitter consummation of your marriage! Toward your bitter triumph. Toward your hope of hate and scorn and dismayed recognition of you in your Cathy's eyes!

XIX

She met them in the dining-room, called thither by Sophy's voice. The first thing she did was to close both doors; the door leading to the kitchen and the door to the stairway. Adelaide was having a nap upstairs in her room.

Then she said calmly: "What's this, Sophy?"

Sophy, clinging to Johnny with one hand, jerked up the other in involuntary defence, as she spoke.

"We're married. We were just married in Loring."

It was the gesture to which Cathy's mind leaped first in dismay. "She's afraid. She's afraid of me, of everybody, probably."

"You promised you wouldn't see him any more."

Apology, self-accusation for not having foreseen this catastrophe, for not having taken sterner measures to prevent it.

"Cathy, we love each other. Please——"

"Sophy, go upstairs for a few minutes. To your room. I want to talk to him alone."

"No. Why?" Both hands now on Johnny's arm, protectively, defiantly. "It's no use——"

"Go on, Sophy," said Johnny.

Her eyes fluttered to his face. They said: "Don't be afraid. I'll stand by you. They won't take me away from you."

Cathy caught the message. Her heart stopped. She thought: "He had better love her!" Sophy must be torn from him anyway. (Johnny Bogan, her brother-in-law, Adelaide's son-in-law! Impossible!) Sophy must suffer, but she must not suffer uselessly. Oh, bitterest of waste, the mourning for a lost felicity that never was. Oh, bitter farce, the sacrifice of tears and devastation to a mocking god, the god of self-delusion.

Johnny repeated: "Go on, Sophy."

Sophy, pressing his hand tightly, went. For a moment she stood in the doorway, a plea, a fear, a tremulous radiance. Cathy turned her eyes away.

They were alone. . . . *Throw yourself at her feet, Johnny. Weep! Weep! . . . Clasp her, clasp her cruelly till you possess her very breath. . . . Pour out your love in anguished prayers and anguished blasphemies. . . . Tear down the wall. Tear open the gate. Abase yourself. Expiate your fault. . . . And trample her disdain. Trample her disdain!*

Stand still. She is lost to you. . . . If you take one step forward and stretch out your arm you can touch her. . . . She is lost to you. . . . This is the first time you are together and alone under a

decent roof. . . . She is lost to you. . . . Her face! God, the strange excitement that possesses you, that has always possessed you the first few minutes of seeing her face. The almost unbearable sense of expectancy, of imminent revelation . . . the hovering on some far borderline. . . . She is lost to you. She is thinking of nothing but how to rid her sister of you. She is remembering nothing. Regretting nothing. . . . Stand still, Johnny Bogan. Stand still and hate her!

"What did you do that for? What do you want of my sister?"

"Do what?" *Repeat it, clearly. Don't mumble before her as if her nearness were choking your hate, which is your heart and your life and your very voice.* "Do what?" *That's better.*

"Marry her. Make trouble for her. You don't love her."

"Who says I don't?"

"You don't. And even if you do, you've got to go right away. We'll have the marriage annulled and nobody will know. Sophy'll get over it. She'll have to get over it. You'd better go away at once."

"What if I don't?"

She looked at him steadily. "There'll be no happiness in this for you," she said.

"That," he said unevenly, "would certainly make you feel terrible."

"No," she said. "Though I'd just as soon you

were happy. You'll be better off away from Duffield anyway. But it's Sophy I'm thinking of. She wouldn't be happy with you under any circumstances. And the way things are in this town, she'll be miserable."

The way things are in this town! Of secondary or no importance the fact that Sophy's sister had had two passionate years with the man who was now Sophy's husband!

His voice was hard, insolent. "She's willing to take her chances. She doesn't break out in a cold sweat because people might talk. She isn't afraid."

She sighed. "She is, Johnny. That's why she's so defiant and so thrilled with her defiance. She wouldn't be so excited if she didn't feel she was taking great risks. But she expects everything to end rosily, like one of her moving pictures. It won't and she'll be lost. . . . If you need any money I can let you have some."

"What for?"

"To help you leave this town."

"I'm staying."

"Well . . . I can't do anything about that, I suppose. But you're not staying with Sophy."

"No?"

"No. Even if I have to tell her you married her to get even with me because I threw you over. That's why you married her, isn't it?"

He ignored the question. He smiled uglily.

"Tell her. Tell her we've been together in the woods and visited half the cheap hotels in Loring for more than two years. I can prove it for you—or I can make her believe you're a liar. Either way it leaves you in a swell mess."

She bit into her lip slowly, delicately. (God, why should a little trick like that turn the nerves near his heart into a thousand needles! And the way her brown hands were folded. And the arch of her nostrils.) She was thinking, I might chance it with Sophy. But she'd have hysterics and bring Adelaide into it. . . . Her eyes wandered toward the window. Across the strip of lawn, on the Smithers' porch, she could see the Smithers girl yawning and idly turning the pages of a book. Vaguely she wondered if the girl had seen Johnny enter the house, arm in arm with Sophy—if anybody had seen, if people were already whispering, conjecturing. There must have been plenty of talk already. Sophy must have been seen frequently with Johnny. Oh, what a mistake it had been to leave town, to go up to the Lakes. And that had been for his sake, to give him a chance to forget. She turned to him, cold displeasure in her eyes.

"I didn't think it of you. I didn't think you capable of anything as mean and cruel as this."

"Cruel! I like it, you standing there and calling *me* cruel! What about—— My God, how do you think I've been feeling——"

"Please be quiet! You'll wake my mother."

"Well, why not! She might as well know now as later what she's drawn for a son-in-law. You couldn't spare her that after all, could you? Practical you've been. Afraid of what people would say, of what your mother would say if we did the right thing, by God, the right thing and got married! Well, now you'll be saying hello to me on the street, not staring me in the face as if I were God knows what and nothing to you. I'm something to you now. I'm your brother-in-law. And I'll be coming to this house and sitting at this table and you'll be talking to me whenever I want you to! How's that? How do you like that?"

"No. You won't. You're not going to use my sister for that. You're getting out of this town. I'll see to that."

He strode to the door, flung it open.

"Sophy! Sophy! Come on down here."

"Johnny, you'll be sorry. You've always been ——"

She stopped. Sophy was running down the stairs. From somewhere behind her came a sharp, startled voice.

"Catherine. Is that you?"

"That's mother!" Swiftly Cathy closed the door behind Sophy and turned upon her, her eyes blazing. "Do you hear? That's Adelaide. You fool, you damned little fool. Do you want to kill her?"

Sophy began to whimper. "You can fix it with her, Cathy. She'll listen to you. Oh, Cathy, we love each other. We——"

Cathy silenced her with a quick gesture, listening by the door. No further sound came from upstairs. She turned and faced the two. Johnny's arm was around Sophy.

"Sophy, he's got to get out of this town. We're going to have the marriage annulled. It can't go any further. I know terrible things about him——"

"They're not true. They're all lies. I don't believe a single thing. You wouldn't, either, if you knew him——"

"I know him better than you do. I know he doesn't love you. I know why he married you. He's got to get out of this house. Come here, Sophy!"

"What is it?" Sophy's voice rose in a distracted wail. "Why don't you let us be happy. He's done no one any harm—he does love me. How can you say such horrible things——"

The door opened. Mrs. Willis, in a lavender wrapper, her white hair soft and tumbled about her round, rosy little face, entered, her hand to her heart in a familiar, frightened gesture.

"What's the matter, Catherine?"

Cathy ran to her. "It's all right, darling, you go back to bed. Come, darling——"

Mrs. Willis, pushing Cathy gently aside, went toward Johnny, peering into his face. She straight-

ened up suddenly, looked around in almost comic terror and cried:

"It's that Bogan boy!"

There was a moment's silence. Cathy could see her mother's heart beating rapidly, unevenly.

As always, it wrenched at her own. That heart must beat slowly, tranquilly. Every acceleration brought it nearer death. She longed to seize in her capable hands the heart of her mother and hold it strongly, authoritatively, so that it never missed or hastened a single beat. She put her arms around the trembling woman and said coolly, swiftly:

"It's all right, darling. He's—going."

Sophy met her gaze and crumpled beneath it. But she clung to Johnny. Mrs. Willis said:

"What is he doing here? Sophy, what is he doing here?"

Johnny said: "Mrs. Willis, I'm sorry if this hurts you, but Sophy and I have just been married."

Mrs. Willis looked at Catherine as if Johnny's words had no validity, no meaning, until they were confirmed by her daughter. She sagged. Sophy cried out and ran to her. Both her daughters caught her as she fell forward.

To Johnny, Cathy cried out: "Take her. The couch in the parlour—in there. Carefully." To Sophy: "Water. Keep Miss Scofield in the kitchen." She was running upstairs for medicine and smelling salts almost before the others had moved.

While with light, sure fingers she went about the task of reviving the unconscious woman, she talked. She talked with clipped quickness—she talked against time, against the too-near moment when Adelaide would open her eyes.

"Will you make him go? It'll kill Adelaide. Ruin your life. It's a mistake. Annulment. Nobody'll know——"

"I can't! I'll die. Cathy, you can fix it with her. She'll listen to you."

"He's no good. And he doesn't love you."

"He does. Johnny——"

"I do, Sophy."

"See. He does. Oh, Cathy, please help us. Please——"

"He's lying. He married you just to get into the family. He——"

"I don't believe it!" Sophy dropped the frail wrist she was chafing and clutched with both hands at her cheeks. Her voice was piercing. "Do you want to kill *me*? Why don't you let me be happy? Why do you want to tell me all these terrible lies? They're lies!"

Cathy, passing the ammonia swiftly back and forth under Adelaide's nose, whispered: "Ssh. Ssh." Adelaide's eyelids fluttered listlessly. "You'll be sorry. Both. For God's sake, stop crying!"

Adelaide's eyes opened, languid and vacant in her white face. They fell on Sophy who was trying to

suppress her hysterical sobs. They turned to Cathy, gathering expression, gathering weak, scattered tears. Cathy held her mother's hands tightly. Her voice was infinitely quiet, infinitely soothing.

"It's all right, Adelaide. Everything's all right. He's the nicest boy. They're going to be so happy. He's really the nicest boy."

XX

To a sufficient number of Duffield homes came a neat, engraved card two days later, stating that "Mrs. Adelaide Willis desires to announce the marriage of her daughter Sophy Elizabeth to Mr. John Bogan."

"We've got to take a perfectly natural attitude," Cathy had said, "so other people will. We mustn't make it harder for Sophy."

"Oh, my baby, my Sophy," Adelaide mourned. "How did it happen? How could you let it happen, Catherine?"

"It'll be all right, darling. Please don't worry about it." Cathy begged for peace, for Adelaide's and her own.

"My baby. . . . They'll think she had to marry him. As if it isn't bad enough, people will think she had to marry him. Catherine! Did she? Did she have to marry him?"

"No, darling, no! Rest, rest. He's a good boy. It's not his fault he's had such parents. The finest people have come from terrible homes often. It's all a lie about his having run wild. He'll make Sophy

happy. He's studying to be an engineer. He'll leave the garage by and by and people will respect him. Rest, darling, rest."

"They'll think she had to marry him," wept Mrs. Willis. She knew only too well the Duffield diagnosis of hasty marriages. "Oh, if your father were only alive. It would never have happened."

Cathy sighed, stroking her mother's hair. Mrs. Willis turned and placed a wet, remorseful kiss on her daughter's hand. It was for having mentioned her husband, for having implied that another could have succeeded where Cathy had failed.

"Nobody could have helped it, dear. You didn't know. Oh, my baby, my Sophy."

Johnny was not returning to the University.

"Can't afford it now," he said.

"But, Johnny," cried Sophy eagerly, "I'll go on working and you've got enough saved to see you through the year. You must finish your education. I'll feel terrible to think I've interfered in your career."

"I don't want any career." He added, moved by a curious impulse to irony: "I've got you."

She flushed, crept closer into his arms.

"Darling, darling!"

He lost himself for a while in her.

They settled down to a quiet existence in the little

house on River Road. Johnny worked long hours at the garage, got an increase from Petter and presented to the world an exact if conservative picture of a devoted husband doing his best to provide for his wife, and spending with her all the time left to him from his labours.

To Sophy these days were vivid with happiness and purpose. She sang through the hours, scrubbed and dusted and rearranged furniture. She made curtains for all the windows and gay coverings for everything coverable. She had the house repainted outside and repapered inside, consulting Johnny eagerly about colours and designs.

"Look, Johnny, this would be darling for our bedroom. The border matches the curtains, too. Shall we take it?"

"Suits me."

"We can have the same design, only in blue, for the other bedroom. Shall we, Johnny?"

"All right."

"And this would be nice for the parlour." The little front room where Oscar Bogan had mended shoes was "the parlour". "It's a little dark, but it'll be nice for the pictures we'll hang. Don't you think so?"

"Do whatever you like, Sophy."

"And I'm going to get some plants. We'll have a little garden right in the house. Geranium boxes in all the windows. And linoleum for the kitchen."

She was spending the little money she had had of her own, and that which Cathy had given her for a wedding present. "And I want to get one of those big chairs, an easy chair for my darling to be comfy in when he comes home from a hard day's work."

Her darling nodded briefly and wished inwardly that she would shut up. He had a novel by Conrad that he had got from the library that day and he wanted to read. Sophy, observing that her big, strong man wanted silence, nestled into his arms and gave it to him. Through her slowly stirring senses, she considered dreamily whether to hang the parlour curtains straight, or drape them gracefully apart with tasselled sashes.

Busy from morning to night, she lazed inwardly in the remembered rapture of the night before. She observed her own happiness with a naïve delight, was conscious of each thrill, of each commonplace task, even of each little grief, with a solemn sense of romantic destiny. Ecstasy and homely happening—each was a dramatic climax, centred about her, the beloved and lovely, the brave and the passionate who had dared all for love and was bestowing on her lover all of charm, all of happiness. Her underlying exhilaration extended beyond him, beyond his love. For, being desired of him, she felt desired of all men, she felt vastly potent in allure, she was magnified and empowered, she felt deeply an affinity with

all the glamorous heroines of history, fiction and the movies. Vanished was the uneasy jealousy that had resented a prettier girl, the insecurity of competition, the vague fear of insignificance. She had arrived.

Johnny observes the house shed its ugliness and gloom in a torpid sort of wonder. Comfort steals imperceptibly on him, its novelty and warmth anæsthetic to his tormented spirit. Grimy with sweat and dirt and grease, he returns home to a strange little world—fragrance of flowers mingling with fragrance of well-cooked food; scrubbed floors brightly carpeted; new wall-paper gay with pretty pictures; a table on which linen gleams whitely, silver shines and china sparkles. Sophy, pretty and smelling very sweet, hurries him into the kitchen where in the tin tub dragged in from the woodshed is a pool of fresh, warm water and a white oval petal of soap floating. "Hurry, Johnny, take your bath and, darling, don't splash on the floor. I just scrubbed it almost *off!*" She hurries out, aflame with blushes even at the thought that she might see him naked. He cramps his large body in the silly tub—they are planning to install a real bathtub soon—and manages to relax blessedly in the warm water . . . breathing in the aroma of clear soup on the stove, juicy steak, crisp, browned potatoes and some chocolate cake . . . and think-

ing with remote and idle sensuality of persuading Sophy to see him in the bath some time. . . .

Then, washed and blond and vigorous, he sits down at the table and is served with supper. The bread is sliced with beautiful precision. The butter, a neat square in a pretty dish, commands a special little knife of its own. (He forgets and uses his own knife to convey butter to his plate. "Use the butter knife, dear." Or he forgets and appropriates the butter knife, jabbing at his meat with it. "You're using the butter knife, darling." He doesn't mind the correction. He approves it. It gives him a dim and curious sense of fulfilment.) The steak is garnished with little sprigs of something green. The potatoes are arranged about it on a large platter, a neat, savoury garland. The gravy is served from a special swan-shaped dish. There are tongs in the sugar bowl. There is a plate, a knife, a fork, a spoon, a place for everything, on the table where the shoemaker's family used to eat its disordered, haphazard, hit-and-miss meals.

"She's a good kid," thinks Johnny helplessly, "a damn' good kid."

Afterward, they walk by the river's edge, or Sophy sews and he reads, or Sophy chatters and he makes an effort to listen, and then the stars come out and it is time to go to a bed that is almost too clean, too spotless for one's clean and spotless body.

Cheat grief. Cheat loss. Cheat dreams.

He struggles against wakefulness, sensing its menace in the dim half-light preceding it. Then, defeated, he lies still, heavily oppressed. His heart is faint. His throat is dry. He is tired, tired, as if sleep has only battered and exhausted him, beating out of him all defences, all shifty adjustments, the savage and saving resentment, the protective and wilful torpor. Grief flows over him, an impetuous and conquering torrent. Wishing to sink, to sink bottomlessly, he needs must ride the waves, like a sealed and empty cask . . . empty of hate, empty of hope, empty of purpose. . . .

He learns to jump out of bed quickly, to escape the rushing inner tide and leap into the thin stream of significance which his outer life holds for him. Or he turns blindly, as if washed onto an unexpected shore, to the large, drowsy softness of the girl beside him.

Cathy was disturbed when she learned that Johnny was not returning to the University.

"He should," she said. "It's important."

"Well, he doesn't want me to work, and he can't support us both on the money he's saved for the school year."

"What is he going to do, remain a garage mechanic for the rest of his life?"

"Of course not!" Sophy was indignant. "Johnny's got brains. He'll be somebody some

day. You'll see, you'll all be proud of him." She faltered a little. "And Adelaide will be proud of him, too."

Cathy frowned. Adelaide was upstairs, in bed. Probably weeping. She always wept after she had seen Sophy. Try as she might to imitate her Catherine's attitude of dignity toward the marriage, she could not reconcile herself to it. Neighbours called, ostensibly to congratulate, and remained to condole, commiserating at length with "poor Mrs. Willis" as she lay dissolved and surrendered in tears. It was a comfort to her at the time; but afterward she felt vaguely that she had been taken advantage of, her shame and misery increased; and it followed that the kinder a neighbour had been the more hated she was by Adelaide. Miss Scofield, innocent and aimless creature, was on the verge of being dismissed for having urged a soothing cup of tea on her mistress, mumbling the while that "children be a great trial," and something that Adelaide insisted was "the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away."

"But, darling," Cathy reasoned, "you know the poor old dear didn't mean anything. She saw something that looked to her like mourning and she said the appropriate thing. You're becoming unreasonable."

"Unreasonable! How can you say that, Catherine! I keep remembering her as a baby, she was the prettiest baby you ever saw, and her beautiful

hair—her braids were so thick, it took your whole fist to go around them——"

"Come, Adelaide," Cathy laughed. "No baby ever had braids like that, not even yours."

"No, I mean later, when she was going to high school. That day she ate too much chococlate cake, nearly the whole cake, and was so sick—— I'll never forget the time she swallowed that button, it was a button from your father's shirt, she was always putting everything into her mouth——"

Cathy hugged her mother. "You little silly." She was trying to make her laugh. "You're making Sophy positively grotesque. First she's a toothless baby with braids the width of a fist. Then she's a young lady going to high school and swallowing buttons and everything else she can lay her hands on. It's too funny."

But Adelaide didn't smile. Cathy, becoming serious, urged: "But don't you see, dear, you talk about her as if she were—dead. If you don't want people to—."

Adelaide, bursting into tears, cried: "Sometimes I think she might as well be. There wouldn't be the disgrace. And living in that house. That awful house. She must be afraid at night. She was always afraid at night. Oh, Catherine, see that nothing happens to her. See that nothing happens to her."

Anger stirred in Cathy, as she recalled her mother's woeful face. She said cruelly: "Adelaide will probably not live to be proud of him."

The ready tears came to Sophy's eyes. Through them she gazed, wounded, at her sister.

"I—I couldn't help it, Cathy," she said humbly. "I love him. Why can't you make Adelaide see how happy I am, how wonderful he is! Why doesn't she give him a chance to show——"

"To show what?"

Sophy's mouth quivered, she gulped and couldn't answer. Cathy sighed and said:

"Well, never mind. The thing's done now, and we've got to make the best of it. That's why I think Johnny should finish his schooling. Since you are married to him, he should build toward something better than his present position."

"He will," declared Sophy eagerly. "You just wait. You'll see."

Cathy made it a point to see Johnny alone and talk to him about the matter. She managed to encounter him on the street.

"If it's money you need, I can help."

"No, thanks."

"You'll have to do something about getting a decent profession."

"What I'm doing now suits me."

"What about Sophy?"

"I'm supporting Sophy in all the comfort she needs at present."

"You know that isn't as important as working toward a decent place in the world for her later."

"What's the matter with the place I give her now? She's satisfied."

There was a moment's silence. Then Cathy said softly: "You talk as though you hate me, Johnny. You shouldn't. The way things are, there's nothing to do but make the best of them. You mustn't hurt Sophy. She's good and she's sweet and she loves you."

"Who's hurting her?"

She gazed at him steadily. Her dark, clear eyes were shadowed by the suspicion of circles. He noted it, and a fierce, nameless pang shot through him. What a crazy mess! Why couldn't he say to her: "I love you, Cathy, I love you. Let's do something about that. Don't let's let that go to waste. That's the important thing, not Sophy, nor getting a profession, nor——"

Yes, say it, and watch her eyes grow empty and remote and cruel, crueller than any living thing could ever be. *Murderer's son. Shoemaker's son....* She was coming around to Sophy's marriage because the thing was done, and she wanted peace. Everything peaceful. That was all she ever wanted, and be damned to any heart that bled and broke because of it. Look at her standing there, yes, a little wor-

ried about her mother, a little worried about her sister, but serene for him, serene and relentless as if she had forgotten everything—and forgiven nothing.

But stand there! So long as I can look at you. So long as I can hear your voice. So long as your eyes recognize me, and your voice, sounding for me, confirms me—evidence that I live!

"Will you let us, my mother and I, help you finish your studies?"

"Thanks. I'll finish them in my own time."

"You had better, soon," she said gently. She started to leave him, and hesitated. "I won't interfere again. We have to keep up appearances, but we'll see each other as little as possible. . . . I'm not angry, I think. It's no use being angry. But it seems to me you're trying deliberately to hurt me—and maybe Sophy—and that's rotten of you. I don't like you for it."

She added: "You'd better not hurt Sophy," and left him. He continued on his way, a little heavier hearted, a little more sullen, a little more dogged.

XXI

CHARACTERISTICALLY, Sophy craved the exciting prominence, the fuss and the fêting and the fanfare that is the pleasant portion of the bride, the world's recognition of her happiness; the lingering echo of wedding bells. Public sympathy had rung no bells at her wedding with a town pariah. But it was not in Sophy to consider the simple and sober truth that where there is no sound there can be no echo. She was a bride; she would never be a bride again; it was unthinkable that she should miss any delight traditional to that state. Teas, lunches, parties in her honour. "Oh, Sophy, he's simply marvellous!" "Bogan, you have captured the prettiest girl in Duffield, you lucky dog!" "What a handsome couple they make, those young Bogans." "Drink to the bride and groom." Happy laughter. A few sentimental tears. Lavish admiration. A tiny dash of envy—among the girls, of her happiness, among the boys, of Johnny's. "I've *got* to dance this one with the bride." "Oh, no, you don't, she's promised it to me." "Pardon me, boys, if you don't object, *I'll* dance this one—and the next too—with *my*

wife." (Johnny simply must learn to dance.) Anyway, Johnny would dance her off, bending his blond, handsome head adoringly over her, and all would look after them. And later, perhaps, when they were alone at home: "Sophy, that young cub was making sheep's eyes at you, the one that was following you about all evening. I was desperate with jealousy." "You darling silly! He means nothing to me. I love you, and you only." "Sweetheart! You have made me the happiest man in the world. You are an angel." And then he would crush her to him.

All her day-dreams ended with Johnny crushing her to him. The hovering little smile of delighted vanity left her face; she grew grave and hushed. The elation of her mind and heart sank slowly to unfamiliar depths; it became a swelling, irresistible force seeking out the core of her being. She would say aloud and solemnly: "I love you. Johnny, I love you." And at these moments the words scarcely sounded in her ears. She wasn't listening to herself.

A few people called. The Reverend and Mrs. Leigh spent an uneasy and conscientious hour with the young couple one evening. "Isn't he sweet?" asked Sophy when they had gone.

"If I see them coming again, I'm making a run for it," replied Johnny simply.

They didn't come again. Johnny had said "yes" five times, "no" twice, and taken out the rest of his conversational duties in brief nods, negative or affirmative as the occasion had required.

Mary Wolven and her mother called one afternoon. Sophy told him about the visit eagerly.

"And they asked us *both* to come over some evening soon."

Triumphant "both". He threw her a suspicious glance.

"What for?"

"Why, just to visit. Maybe they'll have a party for us. They were awfully sweet about you. They said nice things about you. You've no idea, they really said the nicest things about you. They said ——"

"They can go to hell."

She sat, stunned, not understanding, and afraid to say any more.

The Willises had always been well liked and respected in their native town. In time, Sophy's marriage might have faded into uniformity with the simple prejudices and respectable taste of Duffield. Fêted as a bride she would never have been, but she could have taken her place as another young wife with a home to take care of, an occasional bridge party to give, babies to look forward to, and a ready, respectful ear for the advice of older and more experienced matrons. And Johnny would have taken

his place—as her husband. He came of bad stock, he was sullen and proud (God knew, Duffield could not imagine what it was that he had to be proud about!), he had run flagrantly wild with that Risely ruffian. But in the last years he had seemed steady enough, he had persevered against odds in getting an education, and the fact that he had given that up now (only for the present, Sophy assured everybody) in order to support his wife, did not tell against him. The little house on River Road, freshly white, freshly green of blind and roof, denied disarmingly its evil history. A pretty house, well-kept, a pretty bride whose happiness in defiance of predicted misery, one could forgive, since she was always directly or indirectly begging the town for its indulgence.

"It's not his fault, about his mother and father. He's trying so hard to live it down." "He's been so lonely." "He hardly even talks to that Tim Risely, so how could he have gone around with him?" "He's not proud, not a bit. It's just that he's so shy with people on account of—of his people."

Poor, darling Johnny. She could champion him to her heart's content, now that he was her husband.

Cathy observed this attitude of her sister's in dismay. She thought: "It'll be bad for her, if he realizes it. Telling people he's not proud, that he's shy on account of his people!" It annoyed her, too, on her own account. She said, firmly, one day:

"Sophy, stop apologizing for your husband."

"Apologizing!" echoed Sophy in astonishment. "Who's apologizing?"

It was Saturday afternoon. They were walking home from a visit at Mary Wolven's.

"You did scarcely anything else, all afternoon. If you must talk about Johnny all the time, I don't see why you should do it by apologizing for everything about him."

Sophy flared up. "I did no such thing. I don't know what you're talking about!"

"I heard you tell Amy Fells——"

"I've got a right to defend him, I suppose."

"If he's accused of anything. But nobody *says* anything against him. You'd do better not to discuss your family with outsiders. They're good enough for you—you may take it for granted they're good enough for anybody."

"Who on earth was discussing the family!"

"Johnny's in the family now."

"Well!" Sophy stopped and stared at her sister. "After all the fuss you made about my marrying him. After all the things you said, trying to spoil things——"

"Listen, Sophy. You've got to understand this. I'd have done almost anything to prevent your marrying him. It was bad for Adelaide, bad for everyone concerned. Wait, don't interrupt. I hated to think of people talking. That's true. But

the thing is done now, and I'd rather people went about talking their heads off, than see you cringe and humble yourself and apologize continually for a person you love. And a person in our family."

"Why—why, Cathy!" Sophy flushed to the roots of her hair. "You're crazy. I—apologize—for Johnny! I wouldn't—he's better—he's the most wonderful—— Why, what I want is for people to understand how wonderful he is!"

"Damn people!"

Sophy stopped again, a curious sort of shock visible on her face. It was not so much at Cathy's words, as at the fact that it was Cathy, and not she, who was saying them. Cathy went on, quickly:

"The important thing is to keep your affairs so private that people know nothing, really, about you. But if you can't manage that, why then you mustn't care what they say."

Indignantly, Sophy clambered back to her rightful side of the fence.

"But I don't care! You're the one——"

"You do care. Everybody does, for one reason or another. In a way, I care the least of anyone I know." She paused, considering the point. "Yes, that's right. I don't want them to talk. But that isn't caring about them. It's just wanting to be—private. That's it. Wanting to be private. It's the same—you wouldn't want to be touched by strange and dirty hands, you wouldn't want anybody prying

in on you when you were very unhappy or even very happy, or at any time, even. Well, it's just as bad when people talk about your private affairs. They're looking at you and touching you with their minds. And it's nasty, Sophy, it's nasty."

She looked hopefully at her sister. Her way of living seemed so right to her, so decently protective. She longed to make Sophy understand, to fortify her with a pride that could resist all the hazards of her unfortunate marriage. But Sophy had scarcely listened to her. She had been accused of caring about what people said. She, of all courageous, convention-defying spirits! It was no less than monstrous.

She spluttered: "Why, nobody—I—— Why, I'd be ashamed of myself, if I let what anybody said make any difference to *me*. Let them talk! *I* don't care. I'd defy the whole world for Johnny's sake, and you know it. I'm proud—I wouldn't be afraid——"

Cathy interrupted her soothingly. "Come, dear, there's nothing to get excited about. Everything's all right. All I want you to do now is to hold your head up. Don't beg. There isn't anybody in the world you need beg of for sympathy, for anything——"

"Beg!" Sophy almost screamed. They had reached the more populous section of High Street. Cathy's eyes darted about apprehensively.

"Ssh, Sophy, for goodness' sake. We're on the street."

"There! Who's afraid? You!" Instant triumph shone in Sophy's eyes; she expelled her constricted breath in a full sigh of relief. Cathy's admonition restored order, re-established again their respective positions on an important question. Her position thus properly defined, she turned her attention on its pathos. Her voice trembled, her eyes filled.

"If I listened to you, Johnny and I might just as well be *dead* now. Poor Johnny. Everybody against him, all his life—— I'm the only one—— Beg! When I love him so. When all I want is for him to be happy, for him to be able to hold up his head with everybody."

Cathy, giving up grimly, said: "You'd better not tell him that." They had reached Sophy's corner. They parted. Cathy, on the other side of the street, saw Sophy hesitate as she passed the garage. Johnny was not in sight. Sophy went on toward home slowly. Johnny did not like her to stop at the garage and inquire for him. Cathy was about to walk on when she caught sight of Tim Risely emerging from the garage. He stood, hands in pockets, cap shoved back on head, looking after Sophy. Cathy stood still for a moment, watching him. Her face was composed, her hands easy by her sides. But she was wondering quite seriously if it were, after all, out of the question to kill this man. It was not his fault

that he knew of her affair with Johnny. Moreover, the secret was probably safe with him. But no consideration could alter the fact that he *knew* and, knowing, his existence was to her an almost incredible offence. She didn't want to punish it; she wanted only to wipe it out.

She thought now: "He's probably remembering that Johnny had me before he married Sophy. He's probably grinning. It would strike him as funny." She sighed, walking meditatively on. How could one kill a man carefully? She had been considering the matter ever since she had learned that Tim knew. "I'd better forget about it," she decided. "It's one of those things that can't be helped, I guess." She dismissed Tim, and returned to Sophy. She found plenty to occupy her thoughts, on this subject.

XXII

It was Cathy who had insisted on the Sunday "family" dinner. Every Sunday then, Duffield could observe the decorous spectacle of a young couple bound for a Sabbath with "the folks." Johnny in his Sunday suit, Sophy in her nicest dress—Adelaide must always see her at her best. People, passing, smiled. "Hello, Sophy. Hello, Johnny." "Good day, Mrs. Bogan. Good day, Mr. Bogan." Sophy smiled and fluttered her responses. Johnny nodded, unwinking, his arm stiffly crooked to hold Sophy's wifely hand.

Through the gate, up the walk—— Freely, as if he belonged wherever he chose to go.

This barren, bitter moment had been a dream once.

They were difficult, those Sundays, for at least three of them. Adelaide, trying hard to suppress tears, to talk to Johnny as though he were a human being and not some undeserved fatality. Sophy, trying at once to flaunt her happiness for her mother's appeasement, and to conceal it out of respect for her mother's woe. Johnny, ill-at-ease,

feeling at once trapped and insecure in this house, and a little stupefied by Cathy's bright manner.

She alone was apparently serene. She looked invariably as if she were tranquilly enjoying the day. So entirely natural and friendly was she, he was almost hypnotized at moments into responding to her in kind. Once, in passing him the butter, their hands touched. His fingers, trembling, closed over hers for an instant, as if in reflex. And then, for a terrible moment, they were alone in the room—they weren't in the room, they were facing each other over a shattered world, in the woods. Her eyes pierced him. A sick, hidden fear in his soul, a hard, buried ache in his heart, broke into forgotten words. *Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. . . .*

Sophy said: "What's the matter, dear? You're not eating."

Cathy said with a pleasant little laugh: "It's just a necessary pause, isn't it, Johnny? Though maybe your cooking has spoiled him for anything less perfect. Sophy's a genius with roast chicken. Don't you think so, Johnny?"

Johnny nodded dumbly.

Adelaide thought despairingly: "He's stupid, too. And he's using his dessert spoon for the gravy. My poor Sophy."

It was a relief to all of them when Cathy decided that alternate Sundays *en famille* were sufficient concession to appearances. But if, for Johnny, the

family Sundays were an ordeal, the free Sundays were restless and insistently empty.

It was on one of the latter days that Sophy undertook to broach a subject on which she had been reflecting for some time.

"Johnny, dear, don't you think it would be a good idea to go to church? It would help."

"No," said Johnny briefly. Then he looked up from his soup and regarded his wife suspiciously. "It would help what?"

"Why—us. People would see—— Everybody goes to church," she finished lamely, uneasy under his scrutiny.

"That's no attraction for me," he said and set his spoon into action again.

But he wondered about it, vaguely resentful. Was this church business a gesture toward rehabilitation? Was she beginning to think she had lost something in marrying him? *She* lost something! He was placated when, a few minutes later, she said:

"It would please Adelaide." That was different. But he shook his head decisively.

"It would please Adelaide if I up and died on you, too," he offered in grim jest. Sophy's eyes filled promptly. He said hastily:

"For God's sake, don't start crying. I didn't mean anything."

"He's so sweet," Sophy confided to her sister, in

one of her incessant eulogies on her husband, "he simply can't bear to see me cry."

She brought up the matter of church again, each time more insistently. The question was finally settled with a scene—their first.

"Let up, Sophy, will you?"

"You might go to please me," she blurted out.

"To please nobody! History isn't going to repeat itself on me. I couldn't help myself when I was a kid and the old woman used to drag me out Sundays and get me filled up with religion till I gagged——"

"Johnny!"

"You can squeak, but if you'd had to sit beside her like I did, and beside other people, knowing they were wishing she'd take a bath once in a while——I heard someone say once——"

"Oh, Johnny, how can you talk so about your mother?"

"How do you want me to talk about her? You know damn' well what she was." He glowered moodily. "And you don't know it all, by half. She drove the old man to murder. She drove him to it—because of his impotence."

He looked at her brutally. He wanted to shock her. He wanted cruelly to share the shame that oppressed him. He wanted to see someone else wince under its ugliness. (Once, in a hotel bedroom, he had spoken of it to Cathy. She had been sorry for

someone—for his father. She had said something . . . about a wish. . . . *You were born of a wish your father had for something magnificent.* . . . No shock. No shame. . . . The night and its talk had had a beauty, a deep peace. . . .)

He turned quickly from the memory. He stifled it with hurried, loud words.

"Don't throw around any attitudes about 'my mother'. She was a dirty swine. She was as bad in her heart as any slut, only she couldn't do anything about it, and that made her worse." His voice grew even louder. "What are you staring at? What are you shivering about? It has nothing to do with me. There's nothing of her in me!"

Sophy found her voice. She understood only that he didn't want to go to church on account of his mother, and that he was calling his mother horrible names, and that he was ashamed of being her son. The rest, from which she had shied instinctively, struck her only a vague glancing blow. She said, soothing and imploring:

"Of course not. Of course not, Johnny, darling. Nobody blames you. Everybody realizes it isn't your fault. Why, I'm sure everybody's forgotten all about it by now. Why, people would just love to be friendly with you. And if you went to church, and met everyone—you might even get a nice job, in the bank or something—and people would like you——"

"Wait a minute. What's the idea? Getting cold feet? Not so good being married to a fellow who works in a garage, is that it? A fellow a lot of swine and idiots think they're too good for. Think you came down a bit——"

"No, Johnny, no!" She was terrified at his tone, at the expression on his face. "Nobody thinks they're better than you. Oh, dear," she began to whimper, "I—I just wanted to help you."

She blenched. Her knees almost gave way beneath her. He was looking at her, unmistakably as if he hated her, as if he would like to hit her. His measured voice hurt her more than shouts would have done.

"Get this into your head, Sophy. I don't need to be *helped*. I'm no cripple. I'm no mongrel pup that everybody's kicked aside and left for you to pick up and feel sorry for. I'm no ——" he choked. "Why the hell did you marry me? You think I need your help? You think I need anything this damn' town can give me? If you think I'm such a bad lot, you can quit. You can quit any minute, do you hear?" He took a deep breath, and stared for a moment at the petrified girl. Then he snatched up his hat and started for the door. Sophy at once, with a cry, flung herself upon him.

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me alone!" In the parlour, the room beyond, the old shoemaker had crept up on his wife and stabbed her in the neck.

Sophy was not morbidly imaginative, but she had had her qualms before, especially after dark, and once she had fled, her heart beating furiously, from the cellar where she had stumbled on a little pile of shoemaker's tools. Now, with the image of the murdered woman brought vividly before her, by Johnny's words, horror whipped her astonished dismay into tumult. He made an attempt to shake her off, but she clung to him, sobbing distractedly.

"Don't. Don't. Oh, Johnny, how can you? What have I done? I'm sorry. I'll never say anything more about it. I love you. I love you better than anybody in the world, so how can you think——"

He was sitting in the big chair some minutes later, holding her stiffly in his arms and saying wretchedly:

"For God's sake, Sophy, stop crying. It's all right. I'm not going. I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything. Stop crying, for God's sake."

A day or two sufficed to catalogue the incident in Sophy's mind as a "lover's quarrel," complete from angry words and bitter tears to salty kisses and remorseful tenderness. For remorseful, and somewhat tender, Johnny had been. Looking over her head at the laden table, eloquent with evidence of her love, at the pretty, clean room, the flowers, the curtains that she herself washed and ironed every week, he was moved; pity wrenched at him as it had

the night she had said she would marry him. She had given him her life. She had, after all, cut herself loose from a great deal, for love of him. It wasn't her fault that she was stupid . . . and large . . . and fair. . . . It wasn't her fault that she wasn't Cathy.

"Poor kid," he thought glumly. Then, with a certain defiance, as her arms tightened about his neck, and her sobs grew rhythmically calmer, "Well, *she*'*s* got what she wants anyway."

He was gentler to her for some time after that, even though the next morning (and after a tempestuous night in his arms) she forgave him officially, remarking with tremulous gaiety as she poured his coffee that "after all, the course of true love couldn't always run smooth". He was learning to loathe these stock sentiments of hers.

She never mentioned church again.

XXIII

THE winter came. However cold the morning, there was Sophy, fleetly out of bed, fussing with the fire, putting coffee on to boil, patting powder on her face, brushing her hair, throwing off her warm dressing-gown to don a pretty house frock. Then, across the table from him, shining, fresh and deft, pouring out his coffee, scooping out his eggs, coaxing him humbly to the marmalade.

"Just a little on your toast, dear. It's so good."

"Too sweet."

She sighed and spread the marmalade on her own toast.

"It's awfully good," she offered again tentatively.

"Too sweet," he repeated. (How many times? Lord, how many times? One of these days, he would not reply, he would simply pick up the marmalade jar and throw it out of the window. Or throw it at her.)

In the meantime, however, Sophy went about the business of "Keeping Your Husband's Love," joyous and unchecked. Never would he see her frowsy mornings, never would he have to get his own break-

fast, sitting alone over bad coffee and charred toast at the kitchen table. (No man could make good coffee, toast bread without burning it, nor partake of either in decent fashion, on a tablecloth. This was one of Sophy's cherished traditions.)

She did the thing thoroughly. When he went off to work, she stood framed in the doorway, her fond smile fixed over her chattering teeth, her hand waving in farewell till she was convinced he wouldn't turn around again. In the evenings she greeted him as if she hadn't seen him for a week, and then bustled about earnestly, ministering to his comfort. "Your slippers, darling." ("What for?" Johnny had asked, the first time she had produced this evidence of wifely forethought. "For your poor, tired feet, dear, standing on them all day!" "Well, what do you stand on, your head?" Johnny had tersely wanted to know. "Oh, darling, I'm not a bit tired," replied she, moved by his implied concern for her. "Neither am I," said Johnny. But he put on the slippers, thinking: "What the hell's the difference?")

She had his pipe ready for him after supper, the big chair placed nearest the light, even a book at hand. It grieved her to see him absorbed, lost hour after hour in the printed page, but they went to bed early and she strove to be patient. She was intent on making for Johnny the Perfect Wife and the Perfect Home. The reward she looked faithfully for-

ward to was that she would be to him the Eternal Sweetheart.

She grew a little plumper. She let out a seam here and there in her dresses, devoutly denied herself second helpings, and worried.

"Do you think I'm getting fat, Cathy?" she asked anxiously. "Johnny said last night he liked me in this dress because it made me look thinner."

"You're all right," replied Cathy. She had dropped in after school as she frequently did these days, shooting by the garage in her car, her eyes straight ahead. She knew Sophy was a little lonely in the daytime. There was less to do around the house now, and the social life of Duffield's youngest married set had not claimed Mrs. Johnny Bogan. In a sort of surprised dismay, Sophy had observed that her marriage to him had not changed Johnny's status in the town in the least. She had struggled stoutly to bring the sunshine and light of popular approval into his life; she had been shaken and abashed by the evidence that that apparently was the last thing in the world that Johnny himself wanted. Having a pressing need for people herself, she was wounded and a little frightened by her growing isolation from them. It oppressed her; here, for a time, was a situation she could not deal with, in other words, one she could not identify with glamour. Her vigilant romanticism, however, at length rose to the occasion with an inspired flourish.

"The world is well lost for love!" Happy thought. She was obliged to amend it with a practical: "For the present, anyway!" For, charming as the idea was, she could not play out her life within its limitations. But for the present it not only served, it actually enriched her life.

What she did long for, on idle afternoons, was a girl friend to whom she could hold forth brimmingly on the subject of her husband. Cathy served this purpose up to a point. But beyond that she was useless. You could talk to her only about matter-of-fact things, things you would not hesitate to tell to almost anybody. The things you wanted to whisper, to relieve in unguarded utterances—not to Cathy!

She said now, blushing a little: "They say that getting married makes a girl put on weight. Do you remember Adelaide saying she weighed ninety-eight pounds when she married father, and then she put on weight for no reason at all?"

"There must have been some reason," replied Cathy absently.

Sophy giggled foolishly. Unable to speak forthrightly, she was full of mysterious hints, constantly brushing the subject dominant in her mind—her relations with Johnny. She thirsted to tell of her bliss. She strained against the forbidding instinct that intimacies sacred in her heart would be shameful in the telling. The common impulse to confide was a

necessity in her; no experience was complete until it had been told. He kissed me last night, the way a man kisses when he loves. . . . I wouldn't look at him, I closed my eyes. . . . I was ashamed. . . . But I liked it. I liked it. . . .

Whom could you tell that to? What if she blurted it out to Cathy, sitting there so pale, so quiet, so decently calm? Imagining her sister's horror, she flushed, and dropped her eyes. If Cathy even suspected her thoughts. Persistent thoughts . . . wondering if Cathy would ever be married.

"What are you thinking about, dear? You look a million miles away."

Sophy started. "Oh, nothing, nothing. . . . Isn't it funny my being married? It seems like a dream sometimes."

"You'll be quite used to it before much longer."

"Cathy, do you think you'll marry Mort Sutter?"

"I don't know, dear."

"Well——" Sophy hesitated, then burst out impulsively: "I hope you meet someone awfully handsome and exciting. Mort's nice, but——"

Cathy smiled. "But he's not exciting. Well, I don't suppose I shall marry for excitement, precisely." She rose. "I'll have to run on now. Drop in and see Adelaide to-morrow. You haven't been home for nearly a week."

"All right. Tell her I love her and I'll be over right after lunch. And Cathy——"

"What?"

"Tell her not to cry. She cried the last time, and it makes me so miserable."

Cathy sighed. "Poor darling. She's not as well as she might be. Now, don't look miserable. That won't help. You be happy. It would hardly pay if you weren't."

Sophy kissed her sister with sudden warmth. Cathy was a dear. She had the kindest, sweetest heart in the world.

Sophy had always meant to get in touch with her old friend, Grace Horner. At first it had been "when the house is all fixed up". Then it had been the matter of waiting for the new dress Cathy had promised her for her birthday. When she had the new dress, she thought she might as well wait till Johnny was back at school, or until he had a more suitable job. She imagined Grace saying with her tinkling little laugh:

"So he's still nursing flat tyres and stalled motors?"

Grace might be well aware that it was only temporary, that Johnny, after all, *was* a college man. But she was not the girl to let that reflection temper her scorn. She would concentrate on that, and quite miss the larger fact of her friend's happiness. Which would entirely defeat Sophy's primary intention in seeing Grace again.

When she finally called Grace on the telephone, it was because she felt lonely and had to refresh her happiness by talking about it to someone who had not heard the tale before. It was eight months after her marriage, and it was the first that Grace had heard of her since she had learned of her friend's marriage to "the dumb-bell."

Grace took the bus over to Duffield one Saturday afternoon. For once, to Sophy's gratification, she declared herself "dying to hear about everything!"

It was an exciting afternoon. Sophy showed her visitor about the house. "Isn't it tiny?" she glowed, astutely forestalling Grace's criticism. "But it's no use taking a bigger place now. In fact we're expecting to move to New York very soon. In a few months, maybe."

She had, in fact, been thinking a great deal lately of this possibility. She had broached it to Johnny, who had at least expressed no opposition to the idea. He had expressed nothing beyond a grunt. But Sophy saw no harm in considering the matter settled so far as Grace was concerned.

Grace seemed duly impressed.

They finally settled themselves in the parlour before a little tea-wagon that had been one of Sophy's extravagances. They sipped cocoa and munched cookies. They giggled and talked earnestly and absorbedly, interrupting each other. They grew more and more confidential. Sophy felt an all-

pervading warmth, a happy sense of release. Grace was just the person she had been yearning for, to confide in.

"Were you frightened, Sophy—you know, the first night?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. I felt—I——" She paused, her eyes wide and reminiscent, her hands clasped tightly.

"But what did he do?" Grace urged. "What did he say? Was it very romantic?"

"Oh, Grace!" She closed her eyes and shook her head as though words failed her.

"Oh, but tell me. I mean, did he kiss you a lot, and say things—'darling' or 'my bride' or what? Come on, Sophy, tell me."

"He——" it came out in a blurt, "he tore my clothes off. He tore my dress and the shoulder straps of my chemise." The words out of her mouth, she went crimson and stared at Grace in a combination of fright, shame and exquisite elation.

"Well!" Grace looked agreeably shocked. This was no way for a bridegroom to behave. This sort of thing happened to girls "in peril of worse than death," a situation that had for Grace a powerful attraction. In her girlish fancy she had lived through a hundred such, sometimes escaping after much agony, sometimes braving danger fearlessly and reforming the wretch on the spot. Now and then, when the assailant of her fancy was particularly

striking, she was carried away and succumbed. Then she got herself married to him under variously romantic circumstances.

Considering the intriguing information she had just received, she felt that Sophy had got more than her due. It would have been quite enough for her to have been merely married. She felt that a delicate balance in their relationship was disturbed. She, Grace, was the one to whom terribly exciting things happened. Still, the point raised was too interesting to be dismissed for the sake of position, psychologically speaking. She tried to keep her voice calm, but the respect in it was apparent as she asked:

"So what did you do?"

"Nothing," said Sophy, the crimson still deep in her cheeks. "Don't ask me any more, Grace. I really can't tell you."

"Come on, Sophy, so what did you do?" There was almost menace in Grace's tone. She was not going to be cheated out of the rest of this. Her determination carried the day. They were still at it in hushed, absorbed voices, when Johnny came home.

Sophy sprang up, aflame with guilt. She was conscience-stricken, too. Supper was not ready. But that Johnny didn't mind—he was not hungry—and of the discussion that had been going on, he was unaware.

Yes, he remembered Grace. (Her figure had

been like Cathy's. It still was.) She looked at him curiously with her sidewise glance, disturbed as she pictured him tearing Sophy's dress and shoulder straps. He had big, powerful hands.

Sophy asked her friend to stay to supper.

"I have a date——" hesitated Grace, then shrugged lightly. "To tell you the truth, I'm tired of this boy. He insists on seeing me all the time. I can't see him *all* the time."

"No," agreed Sophy, trying to smile. She knew at once from Grace's hesitation that she had no date. She was up to her old trick—trying to "make an impression". Sophy experienced an old indignation, an old uneasiness. She lost the desire to have Grace remain.

But Grace did remain. She helped Sophy get supper. She called Johnny to see how silly and tiny she looked in one of Sophy's aprons. The strings went about her waist nearly twice. "It's not that I'm so thin," she laughed complacently, "really, I haven't a bone in my body. It's just I'm so slim, my waistline and all—— Oh, Sophy, did I tell you about Frank Morris? Well, he said—he's really awfully clever—he said I was a pocket-edition Venus. Isn't that cute? A pocket-edition Venus."

It was the heyday of the boyish figure, the flat chest, the hipless silhouette. Sophy's heart burned. She felt her curves a disfigurement. Her breasts seemed overgrown, her waist spanless, her whole

body was too rounded. Johnny was looking at the slim figure of the other girl, and he was smiling. In her heart, Sophy gave up forever all sweets, all potatoes, all foods merely suspected of starch. Also, she would say casually to Johnny, perhaps to-night, when Grace had gone, "It's a shame Grace uses so much rouge. It's ruining her skin." Or something. In the meantime, she wished painfully that Grace would change the subject and that the evening were over.

It was a pleasant evening for Johnny. Grace provided a break in the sullen monotony. She was pert, she talked gaily; she flashed him bright glances from her dark eyes; she made him pleasantly aware of his broad chest and strong limbs and young loins. He was a young man. The sight of him pleased girls. The touch of him could thrill them. He relaxed in the agreeable moment.

Grace had been put on the bus. She had promised to come again soon. Johnny and Sophy went to bed. Close to his sprawled, relaxed length, she trembled with a sensuality more nervous than physical—the aftermath of her afternoon's chat with Grace. His silence plucked at her heart. Was he thinking of Grace, of how the strings of her own apron went about Grace's waist twice? Oh, if he only knew what a hateful girl Grace could be—— He hadn't liked her last summer, when they had met in the

street. Anyone could have seen that he hadn't liked Grace. . . . She had to break into his silence. She said, trying hard to sound casual:

"Do you—do you like that girl, Grace, Johnny?"

Johnny yawned. "She talks an awful lot," he said. He began to caress her with his big hand, drowsily. His touch communicated to her acutely the smoothness of her own skin.

She thanked God vaguely for her smooth skin, and for Grace's garrulousness.

XXIV

When a year of the marriage had passed, Cathy thought:

"It'll probably turn out well."

Johnny seemed contented enough. Strange word, "contented," for Johnny Bogan. One would have thought there was no content ever for him. He wanted too passionately his own way, against reason, against nature. He wanted too passionately to be proud, to be fearless . . . counting as pride the muddle of shames and vanities within him . . . counting as fearlessness the defiance bred of his fears. Still he must be contented; he was not the sort to make another happy if he were not; and Sophy was fairly breathless with her happiness. They apparently got along. They were suited to each other in one respect at any rate, a vital respect. Johnny had to own a person, and Sophy had to be owned.

Yes, the marriage would probably turn out well, better than she had expected. If they left Duffield, got settled in a larger city. . . . Johnny must get into a more suitable business. He had apparently

given up for good the idea of returning to the University. Stubborn fool. If he'd only let her and Adelaide help him. Couldn't he realize they'd be doing it for Sophy and not for him? Sophy would suffer for his pride. Pride? This thing that one kept sleek at another's expense was never pride. It was a silly vanity.

Ah, well, so long as they got along. So long as there was peace.

She turned her thoughts to a problem of her own. She wanted a lover. Since Johnny there had been no one, and desire burdened her. She had thought of Mort Sutter. He was in love with her, and she was fond of him. She allowed him to kiss her; his fresh, shy ardour pleased her. Once her response had been unguarded, and he quite forgot himself. She had slipped quickly from his arms.

"Mort, if I let you, will you think I'm bad?"

"No, darling, no! I love you. I'm crazy about you. We'll get married to-morrow."

"Wait. Don't touch me. And if we didn't want to get married, if we just loved each other as we want to now, would you think I was bad?"

"No. No." He stopped short suddenly. "Do you—do you think I'd harm you? Do you think I'd do *that* to you? Do you think I wouldn't marry you just because——" He choked, gazing at her with reproachful tenderness.

She bit her lip. She wanted him, she wanted the

moment. Perhaps if she explained to him that it wouldn't be wrong for her—— But no. She had explained that once to a man, to her disaster ultimately. If she had managed it so that Johnny had made all the advances, if she had cried and made a fuss about it afterward, he'd have felt like a brute and been happy. He'd have trusted her and let her alone, and not had nasty thoughts about her, nor dared to say nasty things to her. . . . Perhaps she could have Mort and then patch it up by crying. It was ridiculous, but it seemed one couldn't have peace even in love without keeping up certain prescribed appearances.

She sighed. Love had belonged to her own world, the inner world in which she lived, alone and tranquil. She had surrounded it on all sides with lies and subterfuges and concealments. But she had never woven a false note into the thing itself. Now —crying, making fusses, playing a part—— It was too much trouble. Besides, she wasn't sure she could cry. She hadn't cried since kindergarten, and even then her tears had been sedate and secret.

"I can't," she said almost pettishly.

Her ardour was dampened. She was perfectly willing to meet the world on its own terms, but this was too much, this was encroachment on ground she felt to be exclusively hers and therefore to be trod on freely and without fear. She would do without love until she met a man who

could give her pleasure without feeling he was wronging her or being wronged. Or until she got married.

This was what she was considering now. Whether to marry. She didn't want to marry, she wanted only a lover. But she no longer wanted to run the subtle risks involved in an unsanctioned intimacy. The practical risks one could take care of; one needed only to be careful, to protect one's secret tenaciously from the world. But with that accomplished, one still had a problem on one's hands—a disturbing problem. A man's thoughts to offend one, a man's confused censure arising from his deep-rooted conviction of conquest, from his deep-rooted desire for resistance——

Who was it that had killed each partner in her pleasure? Some queen of long ago?

"She must have been like me, in a way," thought Cathy. To close forever the eyes that had seen her in that supremely unguarded moment; to know her peace, her privacy forever safe from even an inimical thought—that would be wonderful. That would preserve the clear-cut pattern of her being, protect the perfect order of her life.

Well, it was no use longing for a power like that. She'd have to get married. Her physical liberty would be committed, but if she married Mort he would not encroach upon her beyond that. His love was a simple, orderly thing; it would find satis-

faction in physical fulfilment and ordinary companionship. It was not like Johnny's, that had raked her incessantly for some impossible community, some impossible joy. Then, too, Adelaide would be pleased. She wanted her to get married, and she liked Mort. He was agreeable, steady and substantial; his family was good, and he would in time inherit, not only his father's law practice, but a modest little fortune as well.

"Maybe in the spring," thought Cathy. Now that the decision was made, she was in no hurry to act upon it. She wanted a lover, but if she had to marry to get one, she felt she could wait.

All her attention was suddenly centred on something outside herself. Adelaide became very ill. Her health had been steadily poor since Sophy's marriage. She worried continually about her younger daughter; she was always in a tragic fret over what some neighbour had said or implied or merely indicated with an untoward glance. She suspected everyone, she dug out an ulterior meaning, a barb of criticism from the most innocent query concerning Sophy. Cathy, endlessly patient, reasoned with her, scolded her gently, and comforted her with sublime disregard to truth.

"Sophy couldn't have married a finer boy. Look how handsome he is. All the girls are jealous of her. They are, Adelaide, they really are."

This, and similar arguments, seldom failed to give Adelaide a momentary comfort.

"He's bound to be a very successful man some day. Even if he doesn't finish his education. He's just the type that becomes a 'self-made man'. Why, I know an instructor at the University who said he was the brightest student he'd ever had. I know Johnny doesn't say much, but he's very, very brainy, just the same."

The topic of Johnny's brains didn't take so well. Cathy decided regretfully that her mother was more impressed with a person's looks than with his brains. Unless, of course, they were of the showy variety that struck admiration from the people surrounding one, and not merely from some faraway, nebulous instructor.

Her zeal in the matter of Johnny's morals nearly tripped her up once. Rashly, she declared:

"I know it's a lie about his having run around with women in Loring. As a matter of fact, he was as pure as Sophy when they got married."

Adelaide looked at her daughter and queried disconcertingly: "How do you know?"

Cathy didn't flick an eyelash, but inwardly she reproved herself for indiscretion. "You know, dear," she replied at random, "I've taken courses in psychology."

"Is that what they teach you?" said Adelaide in some horror.

"No, little silly. But psychology enables you to estimate a person's morals and character, at least better than a lot of gossips and busybodies." She switched the subject to safer ground. "He's so good to her." That, at least, was the truth, according to Sophy. "There isn't a happier couple in Duffield. And lots of people think the world of him. Miss Peters (the librarian) was just saying the other day what lovely manners he has, and such a kind heart——" And so on, disdaining no effort, no lie, to reconcile Adelaide to what couldn't be helped, to banish the sorrow that was pressing dangerously on her heart.

It had seemed during the last months that she was succeeding. And now Adelaide was upstairs in bed, lying quiet, like a frightened, shrivelled baby, except when the fever mounted and she wept weakly for Sophy. There was a smell of medicine all over the house, and a trained nurse from Loring in the room, and the doctor dropping in twice a day with his cheery smile that told nothing and his unfamiliar reticence that told too much. A boil, a cold, or a stomach-ache, could be discussed in fulsome detail with Doctor Mears. In the case of any serious ailment, he was blandly uncommunicative.

"She's going to die," thought Cathy, and wished she would die at once, and so be freed of pain. Her love for her mother was a curious thing, almost purely maternal. Perhaps the only emotional force

that had its way with her sprang from it. Watching the sick woman's sufferings, a protest, elemental and passionate, surged within her. It disordered her violently, it crushed her into the single, appalling moment. There was nothing she would have stopped at to obtain for Adelaide an instant's peace, an instant's relief from pain. She would have torn Sophy from Johnny Bogan if it meant the destruction of both their lives—— But that wouldn't help now. She should have done it at the beginning. As it was, Sophy—damnable fool!—had curtailed Adelaide's life. Yes, Adelaide might quite conceivably have been well now if it hadn't been for that wretched marriage.

She hated Sophy, she hated Johnny . . . she hated herself! The discovery of this last startled her. She quite forgot her hatred of Sophy, her hatred of Johnny. In a sort of fascination she examined this hatred of herself. . . . It pointed hotly to her, as first cause. If she had not started the love affair with Johnny. . . . He might be in love with Sophy now, but she was sure that his motive in marrying the girl had in some way been connected with herself. Revenge. Rebound. God knew what, he was such a wild, undisciplined creature. At any rate, there it was. Adelaide, this day, lay suffering in bed, because three years before, she, Cathy, had taken a mad boy as a lover. . . .

Absurd. There was no real connection between

this sorrow and that joy. She had taken her joy too carefully, she had confined it too strictly to herself to believe that harm could come from it to Adelaide. She dared not believe it—not because it could not be brooked by tender conscience or jealous self-esteem, but because it threatened all security, all freedom. She was triumphantly a creature of order; she obeyed the laws of nature, man and sentiment, with perfect reconciliation of the three. That disorder could arise from her, *from order*, was a monstrous delusion. It denied her power to protect her life. It denied her the right to do as she willed with her life.

Sophy was continually at the house during this time. She came over after breakfast and stayed until late in the afternoon when Cathy got home from school. She then rushed back to her own little house to tidy up and get supper for Johnny. Usually in the evenings she returned to her mother's side. Nothing was said about Johnny's accompanying her. She didn't like to leave him, she was miserable and embarrassed when she kissed him good-bye. Johnny suspected that she had been asked not to bring him. By Cathy, of course. As if the sight of him might hurry the mother to her death. His bitterness at this thought was listless. He didn't want to go there anyway. But. . . . He had caught glimpses of Cathy three or four times since her mother's illness. She had looked abstracted. There

was a pinched look about her mouth and about her nostrils. She was devoted to her mother, and her mother might be dying. She would feel that. Her heart would ache for that. He would like to see her heart aching. He would like to see torment in her dark eyes and grief in her lagging step. He would like to see her weep mad tears and press her hand against her mouth to still the groans of bereavement. He would. . . . His heart sagged all at once, heavy with a strange gladness, an unfamiliar tenderness. . . . *And then, do you know what I'd do, seeing you like that, Cathy? I'd take you in my arms and kiss your hair and your eyes and stroke you until you forgot your grief. I'd take care of you in every little way, I'd wash you and dress you and make you eat, because when you're in sorrow it's an effort to do anything, it all seems useless. And then after a while, I'd maybe make you laugh. . . . I'd remind you bit by bit of things that make a person happy, that make him want to live . . . of the way we loved each other once . . . of the clearing in the woods that first March day we returned to it . . . of the way we. . . .*

He groaned suddenly. Of Tim. Remind her of Tim. Tim, at the beginning of their love. Tim, all the way through it, at the back of his mind, an infamy perversely goading him to other infamies against her. Tim, at the end. A black moment had linked Tim into their love. How could it have lasted with something as rotten as that in it? *You don't*

know, Cathy, how I suffered because of it, long before you left me. All the suspicions, all the mistrust of you that I tortured myself with—it was as if I had to punish myself for what I'd done to you. You were cold, you were cruel—even when you were mine, you were cruel, giving me so little of all I wanted in you. But I'd have stood that. I'd have forced myself to be satisfied with that in the end. What I couldn't bear was to think anything dirty had touched you. That was what drove me crazy, that was what made me say those awful things. . . .

But that was all over now. He had worn out all his madness in suffering. They could forget Tim now. They'd come together again and forget Tim. Not a thousand Tims could keep them apart in the end. No, nor a thousand Sophys.

Sophy. . . . Always lugubrious these days, always sniffling, given to curious outbursts of tenderness to him. It was as if she were making up to him for some wrong she was dealing him, some disloyalty. . . . Her ardour in his embraces was peculiar, uneasy, shamed, yet intensified, as if some scruple of conscience possessed her only to aggravate desire. But once, when he turned to her, she shrank away, whispering:

"Don't, Johnny. Don't."

"Why not?"

She would not say. He thought: "She's worried

about her mother." Well, it was natural for her to be disinclined for pleasure. But she wasn't disinclined. He hadn't touched her for a week. She was trembling with desire now. Caressing her, he said:

"Come on, Sophy, you know you want to."

She moaned and shook her head in desperate negative on the pillow.

"Don't be a fool." He seized her. To his astonishment, she struggled away. He said: "What the hell!" and sat up. "What's the idea, Sophy?"

"I can't. I truly can't. Oh, I wish I were dead!"

He glowered. "You don't have to do that. I'm not forcing myself on you. But what's the idea? If you don't want to, it's all right with me, but you act to me as if—as if you were doing penance for something."

She began to cry. He said between his teeth: "Oh, shut up." She stifled her sobs. He moved over to the far side of the bed. She continued to cry, for once making no attempt at their usual reconciliation.

Penance. That was it. She was denying herself his caresses because she felt them to be the knife in her mother's heart. God, what were they trying to do, make him out some sort of monster whom it was dangerous to touch, shameful to take joy in? Ah, Cathy, Cathy. She alone had shame about nothing. She did what she wanted to do, freely, tranquilly,

and when she had a blow to give you, clean in the face she gave it to you! No hesitancy, no muddy undercurrents, no pities and fears. . . .

When would he get away, when would he leave these bitter years behind? When would he retrieve the hope and the dream that the loss of a girl had lost to him? But she was the hope and the dream. Without her there was nothing. Without her there could be nothing.

XXV

And Adelaide recovered. Miraculously, she cheated the death that had seemed to have every right to her. The nurse went, Doctor Mears became communicative, the weighted hush that had been on the house became a buoyant peace. The day that Adelaide took her first uncertain steps out of her room, Cathy wept. She thrilled at every sign of her mother's returning strength, as though she were herself the most foolish of mothers watching the miracle of a child's growth. "Oh, darling, you've walked all the way from the sideboard to the couch by yourself! But you mustn't tire yourself. Lie down now—no, flat on your back!—or I'll put you right back to bed." She never tired of watching the pathetic enjoyment with which Adelaide now ate her food. She was enchanted when the frail fingers clicked the knitting needles again. She laughed till she cried when Adelaide, having embroidered some yards of scallops around the edge of a tablecloth, trimmed off the edge—to the last inch—inside the scallops instead of outside; and then surveyed the ruin in dismayed incredulity as if she didn't quite

understand how the scallops had become separated from the tablecloth.

"Just like you, Adelaide!" It was so *good* to see Adelaide making one of her dear, silly mistakes again. It seemed to settle beyond doubt the fact that she was well again, alive, happy, out of pain.

It was this she remembered most vividly—the severed line of scallops on the floor, Adelaide's comical dismay, her own hilarity and joy—on that day which was to come, when she cursed God for not having let Adelaide die.

Sophy, too, was light-hearted again. She spent more time in her own house, and less in her mother's. She gave herself with renewed ardour to her joyous domesticity. The house shone before Johnny's eyes as never before, the fragrance of new kinds of cakes and pies and preserves assailed his nostrils. All her wifely attentions to him had an extra pressure. She loved him. She was making it up to him for her recent neglect. And she was vaguely grateful to him that her mother had not died.

Thanksgiving day drew near. About a week before the holiday, Cathy said to her sister:

"Are you coming to Thanksgiving dinner?"

"Why, yes," replied Sophy. She and Johnny usually spent the holidays at her mother's house.

Cathy hesitated. "I was thinking," she said after

a moment, "that perhaps it would be better if Johnny didn't come."

Sophy's face dropped. Cathy went on gently:

"You see, Adelaide isn't very strong yet, and I don't want to risk upsetting her. When she's quite well, I shall be firm with her. It's time she was reconciled to things. You'll see, dear, it won't be long before everything's fixed nicely. But just at present——"

"Did she say she didn't want Johnny?"

"No. She hasn't spoken of him since she's better. In fact, I think her attitude is already changing for the better. But, anyway, I think it wouldn't do her any good to see him now."

Sophy looked at once sullen and dignified.

"All right then, we won't come."

"But," said Cathy, "I think you'd better come."

"What! You mean I should come to dinner alone?"

"Yes, dear."

"How can I? How can I leave him alone on Thanksgiving day? Oh, I think it's mean of Adelaide. It's mean!"

"It's not Adelaide, it's I who's asking this of you. She isn't well yet by any means, and I want to do what's best for her."

"I can't. I can't leave him alone on Thanksgiving day."

"Come, Sophy, you've got to. He won't mind.

Thanksgiving day is the same to him as any other day, but it isn't to Adelaide. She'll miss your being home."

Sophy finally yielded. But inwardly she was mutinous. Johnny would be angry at her desertion . . . not exactly angry. . . . Her thoughts faltered toward a vague fear that had stirred in her of late. She had displeased him somehow. It was nothing he said or did . . . in fact he had praised the chocolate cake she had made the other night, and patted her on the shoulder and said in a funny sort of voice: "You're a good kid, Sophy." That was a lot from Johnny. He was one of those strong, silent men and she had adored him from the start for his silence and his strength. But it seemed . . . she had a feeling lately . . . *he didn't think her pretty any more!*

The fear, translated into thought, darted anguish through her heart. Cathy had gone. She ran to the mirror and stared into it, her eyes wide. But she scarcely saw her face. She was remembering how night after night, he lay beside her, calm in silence or in sleep, oblivious to the signals her passion hesitatingly gave him. . . . She was plain, she was dull, she was fat! . . . He had asked her twice—three times!—what had become of her friend, Grace. . . . Grace was slim and bright and pretty. . . . Memory rushed to her defence, storming her panic. He did love her, he had loved her! He had crushed her to him as if he'd gone mad. . . .

"He was crazy about me," she thought, her heart thumping painfully. The evidence, to her, was complete. A longing for the glamorous past gripped her, a nostalgia so fierce, it seemed to make her very muscles ache. She couldn't wait for him to come home. She couldn't wait to throw her arms about him, kiss him madly, implore him abjectly for his love. . . . Maybe it was Adelaide's fault. Maybe her continued disapproval had made him angry with her, Sophy. Maybe her own neglect of him during Adelaide's illness had made him resentful, shaken his love. She remembered the night she had repulsed him . . . because of Adelaide.

"She's no right," she thought incoherently. "Spoil my life—it's mean——" For a moment, Adelaide was a stranger, an enemy. All the world was hostile, cruel, lying in wait to snatch her love from her, to triumph over her defeat and her anguish. As if to keep it at bay, the need for action rose in her fiercely. Things to do. . . . She was out of talcum powder. She would run to the drug store and get it. Then warm water, lots of water for a tub—buy some bath salts, too—— She'd put on her brown dress, the one that made her look thinner, redden her cheeks a bit, brush her hair till it fairly crackled, make some hot biscuits for supper, whip up a cake. As the plans flashed through her mind, as she ran upstairs for her hat, a sudden light flared up in her—— This was "winning back a man's love". This was

drama. She saw herself illumined again, enriched, significant. She saw herself a tragic figure—not too tragic—dauntless, subtle, triumphantly recapturing her man.

On Thanksgiving morning, she telephoned Cathy.

"I can't come to dinner to-day, Cathy."

"Oh, but you've got to. Adelaide's expecting you."

"Well, I can't. I simply can't."

There was a moment's silence. Then Cathy said quietly: "Why didn't you tell us yesterday, when you were over?"

"I don't know. Oh, my goodness, how can you expect me to leave him—— I don't see why—— I can't come!"

There was a new note in her voice, one almost of hostility. Cathy said no more.

To Adelaide, in her room upstairs, she said cheerfully:

"Sorry, darling. Sophy can't spend the day with us, after all. She sprained her ankle—just a little bit, nothing serious—and is resting in bed. I'll run over and see her later, take her some turkey. And we'll have a jolly day anyway—take a long ride after dinner. Mort'll go with us. He's coming over later."

XXVI

Now Sophy had, in her struggle against Johnny's growing coldness, a romantic tradition to sustain her. But it wore thin through the dreary winter. She was depressed. Her unhappiness was frequently prosaic. He was not unkind to her. But his kindness could frighten her. He would stop in the midst of an irritated outbreak and stare at her in a wretched sort of pity. . . . It checked her somehow from throwing herself into his arms, from plunging herself into the ferment preliminary to reconciliation. There were no reconciliations these days, at least none that amounted to anything. Perhaps, because she was afraid to weep hard enough . . . afraid to hear him say again, in that dry, unfamiliar voice:

"Cry. You've got plenty to cry about. More than you think. . . . Why did you do it, you fool? Why did you marry me?"

He had said that once when she had abandoned herself thoroughly to tears.

She had a bad cold once, and he nursed her. He even read to her on Sunday, and he was stern in the

matter of the nasty medicine she had to take. She had been happy then. She would have liked the cold to linger indefinitely. She would have liked a serious illness, one, perhaps, that might waste her flesh and leave her quite thin. She knew now beyond a doubt that he thought her overweight. She had admired an actress on the screen one night, and he had replied that the actress was too heavy. She was just about Sophy's build, perhaps a trifle smaller! Her evening, which had been happy until that moment, was completely spoiled.

It was worse on another occasion. Walking home from a Sunday dinner at her mother's house, she had started to chatter about Cathy.

"That was a nice dress she was wearing, wasn't it, Johnny? I think Cathy's quite pretty sometimes, I really do. If she'd get a little colour in her face, and put on some weight—— She's so thin. Adelaide's always trying to fatten her up, and really, Cathy does eat an awful lot, much more than I do, but I guess she's just one of those people born thin——"

He said quickly, harshly:

"Thin! She's not thin. She's just right. She's got——" He stopped, gulped, then repeated: "She's just right."

If Cathy was "just right," then what was she, Sophy?

Her weight became an obsession with her. She began in earnest to ruin her digestion, in her efforts

to reduce. She would have exchanged the fine, classic proportions of her figure for those of the scrawniest woman she knew. When he asked her one day why she wasn't eating—she had been merely pecking at food for weeks—and remarked that she looked peaked, she cried joyfully:

"I've lost eight pounds!"

"You look kind of green. Better see the doctor. Give you a tonic or something."

She thought, with a suddenly full heart, that he'd rather have her healthy than slender. But she determined to go right on reducing. She would be both, for him, in time. She would be all things, for him, in time.

In time. Meanwhile. . . .

He left her alone, frequently, in the evening. Just mumbled something, got into his coat, and went out. He said he took long walks. He had to walk. He was restless. And he had to be alone. She had wanted to accompany him at first.

"You'll be cold. You can't walk fast. I like to walk fast."

"I'll walk fast, really, Johnny, I can."

"For God's sake, Sophy," he had said then, "let me have a few minutes to myself. All day in the garage, all evening here—— A fellow's got to be alone sometimes. Sew. Read. Go over to your mother's. Can't you do without me for an hour?"

She didn't go over to her mother's. She stitched

on something, or she turned the pages of a book, and she waited, numbed, fearful of the shadows in the house, for his return home. Sometimes he was gone two or three hours. She never questioned him as to where he had been. When she heard his steps approach the door, she sprang up, she stirred up the fire which, in her fear of going from room to room, she had let subside. She made tea, or cocoa, or coffee, whatever he preferred. She toasted bread, or spread jam on muffins, and watched him while he ate, her eyes liquid and pleading and tenacious of his every move. And then sometimes, afterward, as if his absence had freshened her for him, or as if he sought desperately to dull a thought, he turned to her as he had in the beginning. And for a day or two, she was exultantly sure again that he loved her.

Once he got home very late, and her nerves, overwrought with waiting and wretchedness and the fear of being alone in that house, found relief in tears and reproaches. He made no reply to her indictment that he didn't love her any more, that he didn't care how miserable she was, that he was cruel. Even when she dared, through her sobs, to cry incoherently that she had given up everything for him, that she had risked her mother's life in marrying him, that because of him she was alone now, cut off from people, lonely, friendless, even then he said nothing, just looking at her stonily. Only when her hysteria

subsided and she began to beg, did he speak. He said:

"What if I don't come home at all some night? What if you never see me again?"

She stared at him, her eyes tear-blurred, bewildered. There was no threat in his voice, only a question, a tortured question. It frightened her all the more. She started to tremble violently. Her lips moved, but she couldn't speak. She looked, for a moment, like a child who is being punished cruelly for some fault he is aware he committed, but cannot remember. Then she sank into a chair and buried her face in her arms and began to cry quietly, in utter desolation.

He didn't stir. He stood watching her for a long time, with a grim eagerness. If he could watch her now like this, if he could regard what he had done, at its worst, and remain firm, strong in his brutality —then he was a free man! . . . The dreadful steadiness of her sobs. On one note . . . all her energy, all her being into one note . . . ceaseless . . . ceaseless. . . .

"For God's sake, shut up!" He almost screamed it, his face suddenly contorted, his fists clenched. It couldn't be borne. "Do you think you're the only one that's suffering! Do you think I'm the only one that's cruel! I haven't done half to you what's been done to me. What are you crying about, what are you whining about? I'm here with you. You've

got me, haven't you? What more do you want? What more can I give you?"

He turned away, but not before her startled eyes, blinded as they were with her own tears, had seen his! Johnny crying! She ran toward him. . . .

"What have I done, darling? What have I done, Johnny? I didn't mean anything I said. I was angry, I was frightened being here alone. Oh, Johnny, I love you. You know I love you. I'd die for you, I truly would. I'll try not to cry any more, ever. I'll try not to be afraid to stay alone. I'll never say another word. Only forgive me, Johnny, and don't feel bad about what I said."

It was almost, in the end, like one of their old-time reconciliations. Almost. . . .

During this time, she saw a good deal of Grace. Grace had lost her job, and she was in no hurry to find another.

"Papa never wanted me to work, anyway," she said complacently. "I just did it because I wanted to feel independent. Mama says I'm foolish, it isn't as if we needed it."

Sophy let this pass, though she was rather feverishly inclined, these days, to pick Grace up on her little pretences. She knew that "papa" walked to work to save bus fares, and that "mama" worried about the price of eggs.

She liked this girl less and less. She needed her,

particularly now, for Grace provided an escape, in a sense, from disappointing reality. To Grace, Sophy could enlarge upon every happy incident in her life with Johnny, both past and present. She kept her happiness alive, so to speak, in talking of it to Grace. And in Grace's envy, she saw herself again as the beloved, the beautiful, the glamorous.

These were precious moments. But she paid for them. For after an afternoon's chatter, Grace usually stayed to supper. And less and less could Sophy bear to have Grace around when Johnny was at home.

It came to her one day, with great force, that she hated this girl; she hated her bold eyes and her tinkling laugh and above all, her slim figure. She realized, too, that she had hated her for a long time.

On this day, Grace had said she couldn't stay to supper. Sophy had not asked her, but Grace had taken it airily upon herself to decide the matter. Only, she added, she'd wait until Johnny came home before leaving.

She was looking unusually well. She wore a new dress of a deep red that became her exceedingly. She wore a fraternity pin that some boy had pressed upon her, declaring "he would kill himself if she didn't accept it." This boy was "terribly handsome, every bit as tall as Johnny, only a marvellous dancer, and crazy about her."

Sophy, clumsily enough, tried to get rid of her.

Her nerves had been on edge all day. Johnny had not kissed her good-bye in the morning, something he always did, even after a quarrel—she had got him into the habit of it. He had forgotten, that morning; he had left the house while she was in the kitchen. Anyway, she couldn't stand watching him and Grace together, even for a moment. She couldn't listen to Grace's chaffing and to Johnny's gruffly gallant replies. She couldn't bear seeing Johnny's eyes on this girl, his hand upon her, for the two now touched each other in a sort of charged camaraderie. She had to see Grace go before he came home.

Grace finally said, half in jest, half in mockery: "One'd think you were trying to get rid of me, that you didn't want me to see Johnny."

Sophy went a slow red. "Why—why, you *cat!*" she said, "you nasty little cat!"

Grace stared, quite dumbfounded by this unexpected blow. Then her gorge rose and she said something about a "jealous cat."

Sophy drew a deep breath, and the storm broke.

It was quite dreadful. Grace stood her ground for one intrepid moment; then she fled, quite frightened and thoroughly shocked. Sophy slammed the door after her with a final shriek; opened it again to fling after her one-time friend the latter's gloves and a new epithet that had occurred to her in the interim, then stood against the door, panting, blazing, not yet wholly aware of what she had said and

done; aware only that Grace was finally gone, finally rid of, never to be seen by Johnny again.

Presently she remembered. . . . The words she had screamed at Grace stung on her tongue, stung her into abject shame. How had it happened? How had those dreadful words found their way to her lips? . . . If Johnny could have heard her! She felt sick at the thought, she wanted to die. She was a vile creature, she was indecent. Wretchedly she flagellated herself . . . and in a remote recess of her mind, beyond the tormenting memory of Grace's mocking face and slim figure, the ugly words she had flung at her friend repeated themselves over and over again, vindictively, recklessly, exultantly. . . .

XXVII

JOHNNY's occasional questions about Grace pierced her. She wanted to scream: "What do you care whether she comes here or not? Are you in love with her? She's a dirty little——"

She finally said one night, in desperation:

"Grace isn't coming here any more. I told her not to. She said something mean about your working in a garage, and—and about your mother."

Her instinct had been astute. His face darkened; he said, after a moment:

"She's a stupid little bitch," and picked up his book.

Sophy blushed as though she had never heard the word before, much less used it. But a great weight lifted from her heart. That settled Grace.

She had now only Cathy and Adelaide. She spent almost every afternoon with her mother, but they talked of everything in the world except Johnny. There seemed nothing to say on that subject, so far as Adelaide was concerned. Since her illnesss, she seemed to have accepted the situation—at least she

no longer audibly bemoaned her daughter's fate. It was as if the death she had escaped had frightened her into a calm, however spurious. But she did say to Cathy:

"She's not looking well. She doesn't look happy, Catherine. Oh, that Bogan——"

Cathy said to her sister:

"What's the matter, Sophy? Aren't you feeling well? You're looking pretty badly."

"No, I'm all right. I'm all right."

"Sophy—tell me. Is it anything to do with him, with Johnny? Tell me, because maybe I can help."

Sophy said quickly, defensively: "What do you mean? There's nothing wrong with Johnny. He—he's wonderful to me." She turned her head away. Even if she had wanted to, she couldn't have put her unhappiness into words. Certainly not to Cathy, who wouldn't even understand. "He's wonderful to me," she repeated and, having repeated it, believed it. "You should see him worry when I'm not feeling well. When I had that cold——"

"Yes," interrupted Cathy, who had heard about Johnny's nobility in regard to the cold, "but why aren't you feeling well? There's no reason for looking as you do."

"Well—I—— Maybe I'm tired of this town. There's nothing to do—I get lonesome—— Oh, I wish we could get away. I wish we could get to another town, where people wouldn't—where

Johnny would like getting acquainted—— I wish *something* would happen!"

Cathy looked thoughtfully at her sister's face. She said: "Maybe it will." She was thinking: "It will! I'll have to speak to him once more. The garage, this town—no place for Sophy."

She rose to go. She put her hand on her sister's shoulder. "Cheer up, dear. Winter's nearly over, and in the spring we'll see about something happening."

And in the spring, something did happen—through no agency of Cathy's.

One fine morning, Sophy, in the act of raising a piece of toast to her mouth, turned a sick white, rose and rushed to the back door. Johnny sprang after her, did what he could to help her, and finally led her, exhausted and whimpering, to the couch.

"It's no wonder you're sick. Ruining your stomach with this crazy reducing. Eating nothing at meals, then gobbling up all the candy you can lay your hands on——"

"I only ate two pieces. . . . I don't think it's the candy, Johnny. I think——"

"What?" Looking at the faint colour rising in her cheeks, the awed light in her eyes, a premonition touched him icily. "What do you think?" he urged roughly.

"I haven't been—— I've been——I think maybe it's *morning sickness*. You know——"

"No. You mean you're You couldn't be."

"I'll go to see Doctor Mears to-day. You see, I've been thinking—— It's three weeks now——"

"I tell you you couldn't be. It isn't possible. . . ." He got his hat. "Go to see him, but I tell you you couldn't be. " Feeling suddenly somewhat dizzy, he started out. Her humble voice stopped him at the door.

"You've forgotten something."

He gritted his teeth, but he returned and kissed her.

Outdoors, he breathed in the fresh, fragrant air deeply, pausing and looking toward the river, trying to shake off his panic. She couldn't be. . . . But what if she were, what if it had happened despite everything . . . the care from the beginning . . . everything. . . . A distant door swung softly . . . not quite shut yet! . . . that distant door that he had never for a moment lost sight of. Escape. His destiny beyond Duffield, beyond misery, beyond shame. . . . He was young, strong, tall and broad-chested. The day stood before him like a comrade, insolent with sun, racy with a swift breeze; a young, a brave, a clean-hearted day. A day to make a journey to the moon seem but a jaunt. He couldn't be trapped on such a day. . . . *Start now! Get away now! Get Cathy. Look at this day for us, Cathy. It's the dawn of the splendid night when*

we first learned to love. All the torture and the grief and the dark thoughts and troubles between that night and this bright day were a dream, a bad dream. Come with me, Cathy, as you should have come with me after those first hours in the woods and then nothing would have happened to separate us. Come with me, my darling, my love. . . . Or I'll go myself! I swear I'll go myself! . . . Oh, God, what if she is. What'll I do?"

Her happiness drove the truth into him mercilessly. Her radiance. . . . He had to do something about it at once . . . snuff it out at once. . . . But his arms went about her mechanically, as she hid her glowing face on his breast.

The distant door . . . shut . . . shut!

"This is your fault, Cathy, I say it's your fault. Damn you, God damn you!"

In the moon-streaked night, he looked fixedly at Sophy sleeping. Her hair was braided, two heavy twists, dark against the pillow. Her full lips were parted; her soft breath struck regularly at his cheek. Her hand was stretched out before her as though she were seeking him.

Well, she had him.

Not quite. Not yet. What was there to stop his leaving now? *Oh, God, why hadn't he gone before! Oh, God, why had he waited!* Who was he to balk at deserting a girl who was bearing his child.

Johnny Bogan. Murderer's son. Shoemaker's son. You could have said worse, Cathy. You could have reminded me I was the son of a slattern, dirty-bodied, dirty-tongued, dirty-hearted. I'm her son all right. Nothing too dirty for me to do. Nothing too rotten. . . . Oh, God, that's a lie. That's a lie, Cathy. *Why hadn't he gone before? What had he been waiting for?*

Maybe the baby would die. Maybe Sophy would die. In giving birth. Mother and child doing well. Mother and child dead. . . . No, they'd live! They'd live to drain him of all hope, to grind him into despair, to imprison him forever. *You forged the chains yourself. You married a girl because you loved and hated her sister. You grasped a life as you'd grasp a memento of your beloved, a book she had fingered, a flower she had touched, to crush under your longing. To appease your grief, you plundered a wretched girl of all the richness of her heart, of all the good things of her soul. For these she has given you, in all faith, in all trust, despite the silly struttings and postures with which she makes the gift. This you know, and no stupidity of hers, nor need of yours, can help you escape the knowledge.*

Help me, Cathy! Tell me what to do, help me now or I cannot live! And I cannot die. While you live, I cannot die.

He rose. Very quietly he dressed, made his way

downstairs and out of the house. He walked swiftly to the drug store. It was not yet eleven, the place was still open. He went in and telephoned Cathy.

She had been asleep, but the first ring of the phone brought her out of bed. She thought, when she heard his voice, that there was something wrong with Sophy. He didn't reassure her; he realized then that he could not have got her to meet him on any other pretext.

Her car swung into High Street in ten minutes. She said quickly as he got in:

"What's the matter with Sophy?"

He didn't reply. The car shot forward. She repeated the question. He said:

"Nothing. Don't drive to the house. Drive somewhere where we can park and talk."

She drew up to the kerb and stopped. "What do you mean?"

Her remoteness, her deep disdain, could not lock his lips now, nor sink his purpose under bitter pride. He said: "Don't refuse me, Cathy. I'm desperate. And I'm begging now. For just half an hour. I won't touch you."

She regarded him for a long moment. He sat still, his pale, fiercely living eyes absorbing her gaze. Only his eyes lived—and a tiny muscle that twitched without pause, in his jaw. One might have thought he were dead, other than that. . . .

She said: "All right. The Calamy road, for half an hour."

When they were parked by the side of the road, he turned to her.

"Sophy's pregnant," he said.

"Well, that's fine," she said quietly. "That isn't what you brought me here to tell me, is it?"

"Yes. And some other things——" He paused, went dead again. She said, on a note of impatience:

"What other things?"

His hands in his lap, he started to crack his knuckles. She thought: "He's in a bad state." A fear quickened her heart. What had happened between him and Sophy?

"What is it? What's the matter, Johnny?"

He said suddenly: "If I could only touch you, just hold your hand. It's nearly two years—how much longer do you think I can stand it? No, wait. I didn't mean it. I don't know what I'm saying. Don't go, Cathy. That isn't what I wanted to say."

"Then say what you want to say, and let me go."

"Don't talk to me like that, Cathy. Look how different I am from what I used to be. It's strange, even to me, how I'm talking to you, quietly, without wanting to hurt you for your cruelty, without getting furious at your coldness. Do you think I'd offend you now? No. You're safe. Just let me talk to you, I want to tell you——"

His voice trailed off. She stared at him in

astonished dismay. She wanted to go, she wanted to get this over with, quickly.

"What is it you want to tell me?"

"I love you. I married Sophy because I was crazy wanting you. . . . I'm not blaming you any more. I shouldn't have done it."

She said: "You never cared for Sophy at all?"

"No. Sometimes I can't bear her."

She sighed deeply. "I knew it. I knew you didn't care for her. I thought for a while I was mistaken——" She broke off, then said without emotion: "You're a scoundrel."

They sat in silence for a moment. Then he said:

"I did everything. I did my best to prevent it. I was so sure nothing could happen. I don't understand——What shall I do now? I can't stand it any more. I tell you, I can't stand it——"

"You'll have to!" Her voice cut sharply into his. "Even if she weren't pregnant, you couldn't do anything. She's too attached to you. You should have let me have the marriage annulled at the beginning. . . . She's a sweet girl. She's a good girl. You've nothing to complain of. . . . Come, Johnny, why don't you be reasonable for once? I'd like to see you happy. I'm sorry things have been so hard for you, but surely you ought to be able to make a go of them now. She suits you. She suits you better than—than anybody else would have suited you. You can live peacefully with her, and what else is there that's

as good as living peacefully? You think, maybe, that peace is a dull and dry thing, at best only a quiet mood, or—or resignation. Oh, Johnny, it isn't so. There's a passion in peace, a most beautiful passion. When you have it, it's as if you were two people . . . a thousand people . . . all the world, from the beginning to the end . . . and there's a sort of intimacy that you never get tired of. . . . All in yourself, Johnny. All in yourself. Every beat of your heart is to some purpose . . . whether *things* happen or not, whether people thrill you or not. That's peace, Johnny."

He scarcely heard what she said. Something about peace. . . . Ah, this was peace—to sit beside her, to *feel* her gentle voice wrap itself around his heart again . . . instead of striking it, piercing it. . . . He drew in the night with unsteady breath . . . wet earth . . . tender grass . . . queer poignancy of mist . . . faint trail of—what was it? —arbutus! April. It was an April night. The other April night, the first April night, had been darker, black. . . . Ah, this wasn't peace . . . to sit beside her on an April night and feel her gentle voice. . . . This was joy, this was ecstasy, this was desire, intolerable desire. . . .

"*Cathy!*" How had he thought that to take her hands, one must leap a world! There were her hands in his, held fast. *Struggle! Struggle, I will not let you go! To-night I conquer! I never con-*

quered you before. What I had in you, you gave me freely, and that is why you were never really mine.

Her hands were suddenly quiet in his. He realized then that other than the movement of her hands, they had been sitting motionless, staring at each other, with not a word said. Her face was white, sharp, exquisite; the nostril lifted . . . in hunger . . . in pride. . . . Oh, that lovely pride of hers! *No, I don't want to conquer it. I want to share it. I want to worship it. I want the right to die for it.*

. . .

He felt his heart burst with his love. All its grief and despair, the accumulated regret, the great desire and greater worship, tumbled to his lips, poured out upon her. She didn't move, she sat as if transfixed, as if waiting. . . . She made no protest when his arms went about her, when his mouth descended on hers. Only when he groaned: "You love me. I never believed you didn't," did she start, as if half awakened out of deep sleep. She said: "No," twice, and struggled to say it a third time.

XXVIII

For the first time in her life, she regretted something she had done. For the first time in her life, she had done something she had neither wanted to do, nor felt she had to do. She was indignant with herself, as she had never been with another.

A fine mess. Losing her head because the night was sweet, because a boy's worship wiped out, for the moment, the memory of his offence, and because desire, through the empty months, had become too strong for denial.

"I'd better get married, and the sooner the better," she told herself severely. "If I'm going to break up like this the minute a man touches me. . . ."

Instinct whispered that it could have happened with no one else; that memory, swift hosts of the past, had invaded and carried the moment. *We were made for each other; like thunder and lightning, like blood for its flowing. . . . You're a part of me as much as any part of myself. You belong to me, Cathy!*

"Yes," she thought, suddenly still, "if we were

alone in the world, if we were at the beginning of it. . . . Before thought, before reason, before one knew how to take offence and give it." Deep within them, in that buried place where man has his identity with earth, with its beginning, they belonged to each other. . . .

So much the worse, then! For one thing, it was too late. For another, it could never have been, not after that day in the woods. He had offended her. Something deeper than deepest desire, stronger than elemental law, had impelled her to cut him off—as, quite conceivably, she might have cut off her own right arm had it offended her.

She frowned. She was remembering his face, illumined with white fire; his voice, torn in terrible agony. How could one love like that? How could one let anything disorder one's life so unpleasantly? She saw no beauty in a love like that. It was to her, rather a deformity of the spirit, the part swollen to excess of the whole. It repelled her slightly, it jarred a certain fastidiousness in her. But it aroused her pity, too.

"I shouldn't have let him," she thought. It may have made it worse for him, encouraged his obsession. She felt a little harassed. The trouble he had been to her. That day in the woods—a horrid mess that had been. Then, the day he'd come into the house—the worry she had had since about Sophy, about Adelaide. And now, troubled by pity, by

a certain sense of responsibility even for him. Mad, wretched soul. She had not understood before just how wretched he was.

Well, he'd forget. He'd have to forget. Getting married to Mort at once—well, in June—was a good idea. He'd see then there was no hope, and could settle down in earnest to the business of forgetting. And then, she looked forward to marriage now, on her own account. She would be safe from herself. "You mustn't disdain the thought that you need protection from yourself," she told herself gravely. "Not after what happened to-night."

She grew tranquil again, as her thoughts flowed on. Things would work out. Order would be established and maintained. It was an excellent thing that Sophy was pregnant. It would perhaps tie her down to Duffield for another year or two, no doubt tie Johnny down to the garage. But a baby would absorb Sophy, who needed just such an interest; it would, in the end, gratify him and distract him from his obsession. He had always wanted a baby. "And perhaps I can persuade him to go back to school, in the fall, finish his courses. I can point out to him that it would be best, eventually, for the baby." His passion gave her a certain power over him. She would put it to good use, to practical use. "I seem to have more influence over him now, than I had before. He's more reasonable, not so wild." When she had said: "This shouldn't have happened,

Johnny. This is too bad. . . . You must think only of Sophy. You must be good to Sophy," he had replied: "I'll be good to Sophy. I'll do anything you say, anything!" And he had looked at her so humbly, with such profound worship. . . . He had kissed her shoes—there had been some mud caked on them and it had flaked off, a little, on his face. . . .

"He looks up to me, in a way, now," she thought, with perfect simplicity. It was fortuitous that he should; it would help her to settle Sophy and him properly.

Of course, he couldn't leave Sophy. Not now. She loved him and she thought he loved her, and she depended on him utterly. The situation was of his making. No one else must pay for it, not even in a single tear. It never occurred to her, that, recognizing his responsibility in the matter, he would run away nevertheless. He was not a scoundrel, despite what she had said. Her instinct had been sure of this from the beginning, and she trusted her instinct implicitly; she still trusted it, despite the wrong he had done her, despite the damage he had done Sophy. She knew now he could do scoundrelly things, in weakness, in passion, but she sensed his incapacity for deliberate evil. He had principles, all the obvious principles. He hated lying, he would never steal, he couldn't leave a girl who depended on him and was pregnant.

She thought of her marriage to Mort; she thought of Mort's ardour and of his amiability. She thought of Sophy and of the delight and fulfilment Sophy would find in her baby. She thought of Johnny, and of how he would eventually adjust himself to things as they were: Sophy *was* suited to him; who else could give him that complete, that concentrated devotion that his nature required? She thought of the tidy little sum she had saved through the years of teaching—it would see Johnny through college, it would help lay the proper foundation for Sophy's future. And she thought of Adelaide. Her whole body went soft and drowsy with content as she thought of Adelaide. Adelaide would be pleased at her marriage to Mort; she would be thrilled at the thought of Sophy's having a baby; the baby. . . . Johnny's return to the University . . . his eventual success . . . all these must reconcile her completely to Sophy's marriage. Adelaide would be happy.

Then she saw the dawn begin to sharpen the shadowy outlines of the trees across the street. She thought: "Goodness, it's late," and closing her eyes, fell promptly asleep, with that extraordinary competence of hers. She slept beautifully, always in the same position, on her right side, one hand under her cheek, the other relaxed before her. The sheets on which she slept scarcely ever showed a wrinkle.

XXIX

Sophy was in a state of beatitude. She was going to have a baby! A little, soft creature to cradle in her arms, to croon to, to dress in adorable garments —to tie her husband's love securely to her. That's what babies did. They glorified a woman in a man's eyes, they tapped deep reserves of tenderness in him, they knit husband and wife together in beautiful and indissoluble bonds. Dear Johnny! How sweet he had been to her this morning. He seemed so happy, happier than even she was. He seemed caught in a deep excitement. He kept saying, as if to himself:

"It's all right. It's all right. You can have the baby. It won't make any difference. It'll be good for you."

Poor darling. He must have been worried about the money, last night when she told him—he had looked so—so aghast. Babies were an expense. Probably all through the night he had thought and thought about it—despite that luminous joy on his face, he looked as if he hadn't slept. But he must have figured a way out. Perhaps he would try for

a better job. Perhaps they would move to another city. For the baby's sake. . . . For her sake, too. He had said:

"You deserve something better than I can give you. You're good, Sophy."

She had, for some reason, begun to cry when he said that. The winter had been so hard. He said then, in a queer voice:

"Don't cry, Sophy. It'll be best for you in the end. I'll be good to you now. . . . " He had begun to crack his knuckles, and for a moment his face got all set and wretched, as if he were sorry. . . .

And before he left the house, he said:

"You love me, Sophy, don't you? You love me enough to do anything for me, don't you?"

For answer, she had kissed him and clung to him, feeling holy, feeling blissful, feeling safe.

She thanked God devoutly for her pregnancy. It had set everything right again, beautifully right. She pictured herself a mother, young, beautiful, reverently adored by the father of her child . . . passionately adored. . . . The first misgiving struck her. She would get fat. Implacably her figure would widen, broaden, amplify in every curve. In short, she would look awful. . . . But that would be only for a time. Johnny would forgive her for that; he would understand it couldn't be helped. And then, after the baby came, she would get so slender, she determined, that people would

scarcely recognize her. . . . Sophy, how *thin* you've become! You look so lovely, so—so *svelte!* . . . And Johnny, by her side, would look proudly at her.

Dreams rushed in on her. They would have a lovely home, lovely furniture, lots of money that Johnny was sure to make eventually at a good job, in a large city. They would have delightful friends . . . men who admired her, whom Johnny would watch with blazing eyes as they bent over her. . . . The baby would be a little girl, or a little boy, golden-haired and blue-eyed, and people would remark on what a beautiful family the three of them made. . . . She would get pretty clothes, bewitching clothes. Her fancy sketched costumes, all the lovely dresses she had ever seen and wanted. There was a wine-red dress among them, it had a wide bertha . . . she could wear red as well as . . . *Grace!* It was the dress Grace had worn on the day of their quarrel, that she was thinking of! She flushed; the memory of that ugly scene filled her with shame—and for the first time, with remorse. Perhaps she hadn't been fair to Grace. Johnny had never even liked her. Not that she, Sophy, ever feared that he had. But Grace got on one's nerves so, thinking she was irresistible, and flirting . . . shameless little fool! It was just as well, anyway, that she no longer came to the house.

She dismissed all thought of Grace, and returned

cosily to the contemplation of the present and the future. The future, particularly. She had a lovely morning.

She had a lovely afternoon. She was due at Adelaide's for the midday meal, and when she broke her news, food was nearly forgotten in the excitement. Adelaide wept a little, but she could not conceal the fact that she was more pleased than otherwise at the notion of being a grandmother. Sophy felt herself now sacred, she knew she was bearing the fruit of a great love, and she was inclined to regard her pregnancy, on the whole, as a divine and thrilling mystery. But when Adelaide brought it down to earth, she did not object; earth was pleasant too; and soon she was thoroughly absorbed in the conversational bustle and to-do; what to buy and what to make by hand, how many yards of this and how many yards of that, whether to be confined at the Loring hospital, or at her own house, or at Adelaide's. There was also considerable discussion on what to name the child. Herbert John (Herbert, after the late Mr. Willis) or John Herbert, if it were a boy. Adelaide, of course, if it were a girl. But Adelaide what? "Adelaide Tamaris," cried Sophy as if on a sudden inspiration. But she had it in her mind all the time. She had a passionate admiration for the name which she had encountered in a very romantic novel.

Adelaide thought "Tamaris" sounded un-Chris-

tian; in fact, it had a slightly bold sound. "But think," cried Sophy, "we can call her 'Tam'!" It seemed to her indescribably piquant to have a child called "Tam". It suggested something romantically wayward, it had a sweep, a dash, an aristocratic casualness. . . .

"Tam," said Adelaide, "is a hat."

They were still at it when Cathy came home. She received the news calmly—Cathy never got excited about anything. But she was pleased, her smile was very bright.

"That's fine. It's about time Adelaide became a grandmother with two big girls like us in the family." She patted her mother's cheek. "You'll be the prettiest grandmother in the county, darling."

Adelaide looked up at her daughter and thought: "She must take a tonic this spring." Her eyes misted. Her good, dear Catherine. She looked so tired, so thin, so scantly endowed beside the fullness of Sophy. She should be getting married, too. Her marriage would not be like Sophy's. It would include her mother, enrich her; it would justify maternal pride, and put at rest maternal fears. There would be a church wedding, hearty congratulations from everybody. Mortimer would become her son; they would live together, the three of them, in harmony, in a richer happiness. . . .

She said in her pert, little way: "And what about

you, Catherine? When are you going to . . . make me a grandmother?"

She blushed, looked a little frightened at her own daring. The girls laughed; Cathy hugged her.

"Bold! You're getting so indecent, I shouldn't be surprised to see you bobbing your hair one of these days. You should have seen her, Sophy, the other day in Loring—she looked positively reckless, staring at the underwear in the windows of 'Ye Little French Shoppe.'"

Adelaide, all aglow, protested. She adored these little scenes. Sophy, beaming with her own content, said after a moment:

"But when are you going to get married, Cathy? I should think it's about time—Mort crazy about you all these years—— And I should think you'd be tired of teaching in school, just going on and on——"

Cathy smiled. "I don't mind teaching," she said, "but I guess there isn't much point in going on and on. I'm going to be married at the end of June."

"No!"

"Oh, Catherine!"

In the excitement that followed now, one would have been at a loss to decide whether it was Sophy or Adelaide who was the prospective bride. It was finally decided between these two—Cathy did throw

in a casual word or two—that the engagement would be announced at the end of the week, that the marriage would take place on the twenty-eighth of June—which was Adelaide's birthday—that there would be four bridesmaids, with Sophy as matron of honour.

"April, May, June," figured Sophy rapidly. "No, I won't show yet."

She felt suddenly a little wistful. She would have liked a real wedding, too. Well, she had had an elopement, and elopements were, after all, more exciting. And then she had Johnny. Even after nearly two years, it was infinitely more thrilling to have Johnny than any number of real weddings with merely Mort.

Adelaide was trying to decide which one of her male relatives could most appropriately give the bride away, when Cathy remarked with a little laugh:

"We're counting our chickens before time. Mort doesn't know yet."

"Catherine! But he—but he——"

"There, darling. He's asked me two or three times. I guess it'll be all right with him. I'll tell him to-night. He's coming over after supper."

"All right with him!" exploded Sophy. "Honestly, Cathy, you're the most cold-blooded—— One'd think she was telling Mort he could come to supper!"

"Oh, no," said Cathy tranquilly, "I'm really quite thrilled."

Sophy had to take her leave shortly afterward.

"I've got to get supper ready, Johnny'll probably be home early to-night. I told him I wanted to go to the movies and we like to catch the first show."

Cathy drove her home. Sophy chatted animatedly throughout the short drive. "Johnny was so thrilled about the baby. You should have seen him this morning, Cathy. He was so happy. And—and he's so good to me. He said I deserve a lot, he—— I think a baby sort of ties two people together in a most beautiful way, don't you, Cathy?"

"Yes," said Cathy. "It should."

She thought: "I wonder if I ought to tell him myself. Sophy'll tell him and it might startle him, and he might show it. . . ." But Sophy was not one to notice things. And even if she did, it wouldn't mean anything to her.

Just the same—she was a careful girl—she said casually, as Sophy got out of the car:

"By the way, Sophy, don't tell anyone about my getting married. Not yet." She laid judicious stress on the "anyone."

"Of course," promised Sophy. She understood perfectly. Cathy was, after all, human. She wanted the pleasure of telling people herself.

XXX

THERE was soup simmering on the stove, a salad in the icebox. The chops were in the oven, broiling slowly, and the pan of deep fry was ready for the precisely sliced potatoes. She stood near the stove, in a fresh, enveloping apron, busy, chattering happily. He stood against the door, his hands in his pockets, watching her.

It was good to stand here and watch her. God, it was good. There she was, real, tangible, something one could see with one's eyes, touch with one's hands . . . thrust swiftly, strongly aside, almost with a word! One was helpless against ghosts—ghosts of evil moments, and dark, bitter words. . . . But now, the ghosts were laid. This girl alone stood in his way, and she was substance, and one could cope so well with substance. . . .

Ah, miracle! Cathy was his again; she had forgiven him; she loved him. He longed to tell Sophy this; to tell someone of this joy that was bursting in him; to pour out his tumult of love and adoration and hope. This was salvation. This was that Beginning which once he had planned. Last night had

snapped the thread of continuity. Last night had freed him from the bitter iron. Now he could shape his destiny, for now he had his source—proud source!—in her love and her forgiveness. Everything he did, everything he thought would now belong to her; and he would give her nothing that was not beautiful. He would be good to Sophy . . . good. . . .

Exult. . . . Watch her happiness and know yourself strong enough to thrust it out of your way. . . . But gently. Destroy it gently, and with so much pity that the wound would be healed almost in the giving of it. You'll be happy with someone else, Sophy. You'll let me go. You love me enough to do anything for me. You said so. But you can't love me, as I love her. I can't let her go. I can't. . . . You couldn't understand, nobody could, I hardly understand myself how it is I need her so. Losing her forever . . . it's fantastic, such things don't happen; the world, however terrible, was not made for such things. And having her . . . that's fantastic too, but it's as if everything were made possible, it's as if you might even grow so tall that you could touch the stars and see what they were made of. . . . Do you see how I love her? Do you see how I can't let her go? . . .

Cathy, Cathy, Cathy.

"—and Cathy said——"

She had been talking of her mother, of how

pleased her mother had been because she was pregnant. Her words had been a soft "tap, tap" on the outside of his mind, as on a securely locked door. Now he listened suddenly. The sounds she made now, flowed into him as if the word "Cathy" had opened him wide. They flowed into him, having no meaning at once; they drifted through his joy, were intimately part of his joy, because they concerned her. . . .

"——greatest news about Cathy. Only you mustn't tell anybody because she wants to tell people herself."

Of course Cathy hadn't meant Johnny, when she had asked her to keep the news from people. Johnny wasn't people. He was one of the family, according to Cathy herself.

"She's going to be married. In June."

She had thrown more potatoes into the pan, and jumped back from the splutter of the fat, and said: "Supper will be ready in a minute now," before the sounds separated themselves from his joy, tore through it to his mind, and became a meaning . . . not so much a meaning yet, as a vague, an evil menace. . . . "I was so excited about it, Adelaide too, we were more excited than Cathy herself. She's funny, Cathy. To hear her talk, you'd think Mort was no more than coming to supper." She laughed. "I don't think anything in the world could get her excited——"

"Eh?"

She shook the potatoes in the pan, but her head turned toward him in startled concern. The "eh?" was like a little explosion, sharp, cracked, shrill.

"I said, I don't think anything would—— Why, what's the matter, Johnny?"

"What's this—— You're crazy. What's this about her getting married?"

"Why, Johnny! She is. She said so, and Cathy never says anything unless she's quite sure." She looked at him uncertainly, her heart began to beat in a curious dismay. But she went on: "It does seem funny in a way. I sometimes thought myself she never would, she'd be an old maid——" She opened the oven quickly and turned the chops—just in time.

"Mort's been crazy about her——"

"Liar! What a rotten lie. What a cruel lie!"

She stared at him, dumbfounded. She was frightened, suddenly badly frightened, not so much at what he had said, as at his tone and his face. Her fright, in an instant, became a conviction that he was mad. She gave a little shriek and retreated from him involuntarily.

"Johnny, what's the matter? Don't frighten me. What have I said?"

"Spite. Spite. That's what it is. Telling me such a thing—— You think I believe you? What's this? Tell me again. What did you say? You said she was going to marry this fellow?"

Her jaw hanging, her eyes bulging with terror, she could only nod her head foolishly. He was mad. He had suddenly gone mad. The potatoes were spluttering in the pan. The chops were burning in the oven. And Johnny had gone mad.

"*No!*" He started toward her blindly. She shrieked again, and he stopped, his eyes fixed beyond her. A groan came from him, and it sounded as though his throat were tearing.

"But she'd do anything. It's true. She'd do anything!" He grasped her by the arms, violently. His face was close to her. She couldn't move or cry out, she couldn't even close her eyes to shut out his face. "She can't! It's your fault. It's because of you. That's why she's doing it. Because of you. Come! You've got to tell her. You've got to tell her it's all right, you don't want me, you'll let me go!"

He started to drag her toward the door. Then, as suddenly as he had seized her, he let her go. She didn't matter. Nothing she could say mattered. And he had to get to Cathy. He had to run, unhampered, unhindered; he had to run as he had never run before, because these moments before he saw Cathy, before he heard her voice, could truly not be borne.

She stood where he had left her for a moment. Then she started after him. Her feet moved almost without volition. Drunkenly—seeing nothing, hear-

ing nothing, conscious only of something that was slowly gouging her heart out—she ran through the streets after him.

Cathy leaped up and placed herself between him and her mother who sat at the other end of the table. He was unable to speak for a moment; his breath came in great gasps. That moment was the worst for Cathy—unable to believe it, she yet saw distinctly a monstrous hurt advancing upon Adelaide and knew herself powerless to stop it. It was, in a curious way, almost a relief when his words began to crash in her ears, to bring her world toppling down, burying Adelaide, killing Adelaide. . . .

"It isn't true! It isn't true. It's a trick to torture me. You can't marry anyone else. You can't belong to anyone else. Cathy, my love! Speak to me. Tell me it isn't true. . . . Oh, God, what about last night? What about last night? Don't punish me any more. I can't bear any more. I've been rotting for two years. Rotting! I know. I could taste my breath, I could feel it. God, Cathy, listen, listen to me for once, and listen, you too, Mrs. Willis. I've been to the woods where we used to go and kissed the ground where we used to lie, till my lips bled. Often, often. She was mine for two years and she was mine again last night. Let me have my love. I'll be good to her, I'll be good to everybody. Only

let me have her. She's mine. I'll kill anyone who touches her. Cathy, Cathy——"

He tried to touch her. She looked at him, and for one quite mad moment, believed that her mighty hatred could kill him where he stood. He saw that in her eyes, and he almost believed it, too; he had no fear but he couldn't bear it. He cried out, shouting:

"All right, then. But you won't marry anyone. You won't love anyone else. That's what you want, that's what you've always wanted. Two years in the woods with me, in hotels, and when you weren't with me, I never knew where you were or with whom. Where were you? Where? And with whom? Tell me. Tell her, so she'll see how I've suffered, she'll see what you are—for any man to love."

His hand reached out, resounded from its impact on her cheek. She reeled a little. She saw Sophy, just stumbling through the door, standing against it, ghastly pale, shaking from head to foot. She saw Adelaide slipping from her chair to the floor, saw Miss Scofield run from the kitchen to pick her up. She saw, through the window, faces crowding around the gate; they seemed to drift toward her in a shaft of dying sunlight. She saw a line of embroidery, severed scallops trailing on the floor; Adelaide's comically dismayed face; her own face, bright with laughter, flushed with joy because

Adelaide was alive and well. She saw why they hadn't let Adelaide die before; they were saving her for this. She saw herself in the summer woods, smiling into a boy's fiercely pale eyes, holding him and the world in her clasped, strong arms. She saw an ugly face peering . . . innumerable ugly faces peering. . . . She saw Adelaide dying slowly of grief. She saw Sophy, bearing her child with her lonely ravaged heart. She saw him staring at her and holding his hand, as if the blow it had struck her had severed it cruelly. . . .

In one flash she saw all this, confused in a crazy pattern, so that she couldn't be sure which of it had been and which of it was now and which of it would be.

And then, all at once, with extraordinary clarity, she saw this pattern, as not crazy at all. Jumbled it was and insolently crude, so that the heart of one who was proud and loved order in all things might well stop with despair. But order was there, cunning in its tortuous and hidden progression, effect after cause, implacably, from the night, a world ago, when she had taken a mad boy as a lover, to this. All her plans, all her care, all her infinite pride and imperial freeness had been used, almost negligently, to lead her to this. . . . *Insolence. Unbearable insolence.*

Then, this happened. Her head went up very high, and she stood perfectly still, and her black,

mad eyes scarcely saw Johnny, for her quarrel was not with him, but with God. And it was a bitter, terrible and irrevocable quarrel. And in it, she did this: She picked up a knife from the table, and put it in Johnny's hands and closed her own hands over his.

"Finish it," she said, and her voice was so hard, it was almost more substance than sound. "My hands aren't strong enough, and I'm tired." His hands shook violently in the steadiness of hers. Otherwise he might have been turned to stone, even to his eyes which stared at her in an anguished hypnosis. She said:

"I slept with other men—all the time I was with you."

And she said:

"I shall do it again, if I live."

And she said:

"Don't you see that it's all you can do for me now? And all I can do for you?"

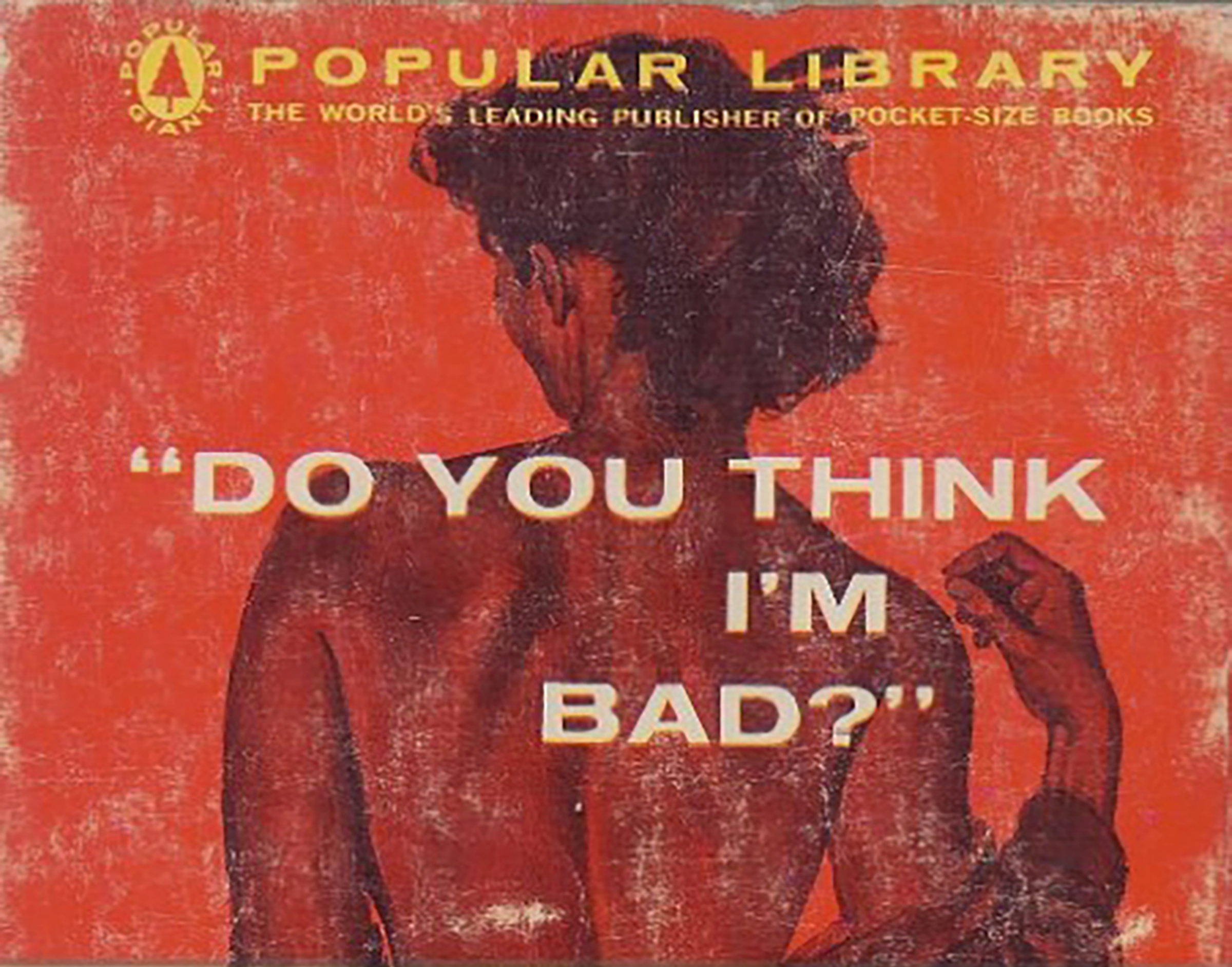
And she said, and her voice was crumbling now:

"Don't you see you've killed me anyway. Put me to rest."

So he struck. At the point where his hands failed, hers tensed to their last strength.

Sophy tried to scream.

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The girl in Johnny Bogan's arms was a new one, but the question was an old one. "No," he told her. "I don't think you're bad." She moved closer to him on the grass.

"Do you come here with other girls?" He smiled in the darkness. "No," he lied.

"Don't you want to kiss me, Johnny?" Suddenly she was clinging to him as if the earth had dropped away from her. He could feel the soft pressure of her body against him. She's so innocent, he thought. I mustn't. Not with her.

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Originally published by The Vanguard Press, Inc.